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By Greg Tate

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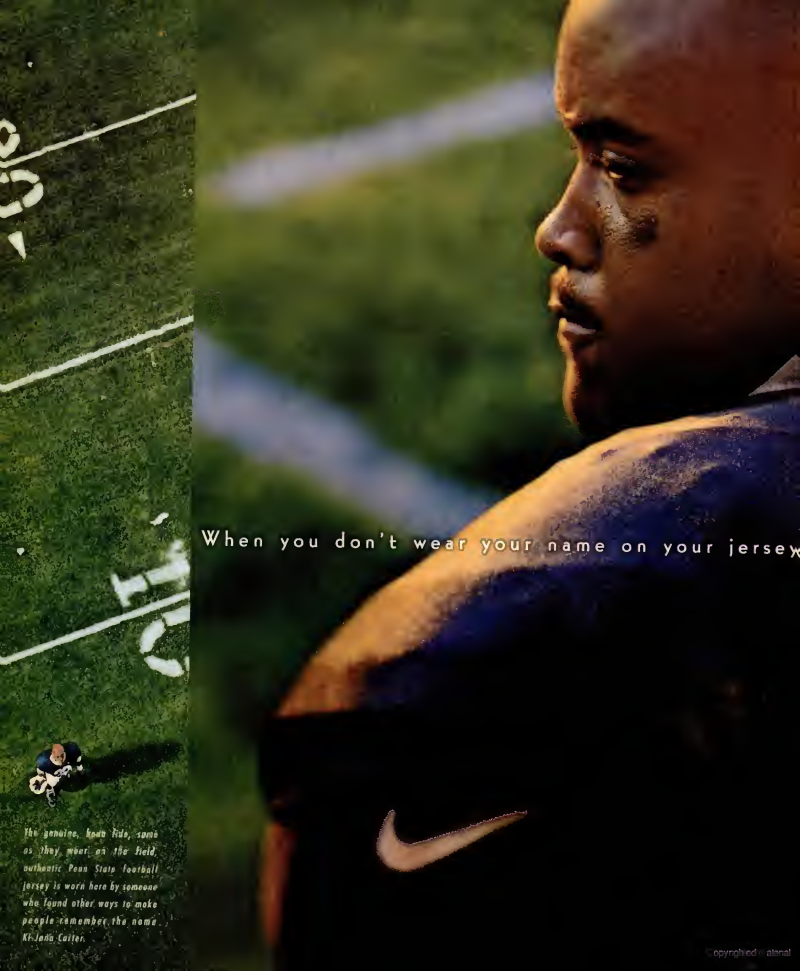
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ON THE COVER AND ABOVE

Jodeci photographed by Geoffrey De Boismenu; styling by Estée Ochoa; grooming by Trina Cooper for Jam Arts, N.Y.C. DeVante's hair by Karyl "Kap" Laws. On the cover: Pewter metallic classic leather trench coat by Polo by Ralph Lauren. See The Details.



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DERICK

VIBE's new fashion director, **Derick Procope**, takes this month's fashion story, "Urban Warriors" (page 96), to a place where Native American and black cultures meet. Procope says of the tale, shot in New York City, "It felt natural doing this because of the similarities of the cultures—both are ornate and natural at the same time." Procope worked for five years as a contributing editor for *The Face*, and has contributed to *Rolling Stone* and *Arena*.

Freelance writer **Sharon Gordon** gathered some of the best artists in reggae for her roundtable discussion "Dawn of the Dread" (page 84). The Kingston native says, "Reggae is a special music given to my people, and a part of Jamaican history. Some people have negative ideas about it, but it's a music that heals people." A Brooklyn resident for the past 17 years, Gordon writes a column for the newspaper *Caribbean Life* and contributes to *Dub Missive* magazine.



SHARON

CONTRIBUTORS

Chinese photographer **Alexi Tan** shot actress Joan Chen for "Taking on the Flavor" (page 80). A native of Manila, his work has also appeared in *Harper's Bazaar*.... VIBE writer-at-large **Kathy Dobie** uncovered penitentiary poetry culture in "My Shackled Love" (page 92). Dobie, an associate editor for *Pacific News Service*, writes for many publications.... *ego* trip managing editor **Elliott Wilson** wrote the lead review in this issue's *Revolutions*, and has written for *Rap Pages*, *Urb*, and *Bomb*.... French photographer **Philippe Blalobos** shot model *Wale* for this issue's *Look*. He has contributed to French *Elle*, *in fashion*, and *Mademoiselle*.



DAN (WITH RICHARD)

Photographer **Dan Winters** says that he found Richard Pryor ("Pryor Lives," page 74) to be a professional, accommodating, and funny subject. "When I first met him," Winters says, "I shook his hand and said, 'Thanks for having us over,' and he said, 'Thanks for breaking my hand.' With all he's been through, he could definitely be a bitter human being—but he's exactly the opposite." Winters is a native of California, and contributes to *GQ* and *Texas Monthly*.

VIBE writer-at-large **Greg Tate** admits to not having had any questions prepared for "Pryor Lives." He says, "It was when I looked into Richard's eyes that I knew where to begin. His genius, honesty, and comedy are in the marrow of his bones." A staff writer at the *Village Voice*, Tate has contributed to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, and is currently finishing a collection of four novellas titled *Love: Image of the Beast*.



GREG

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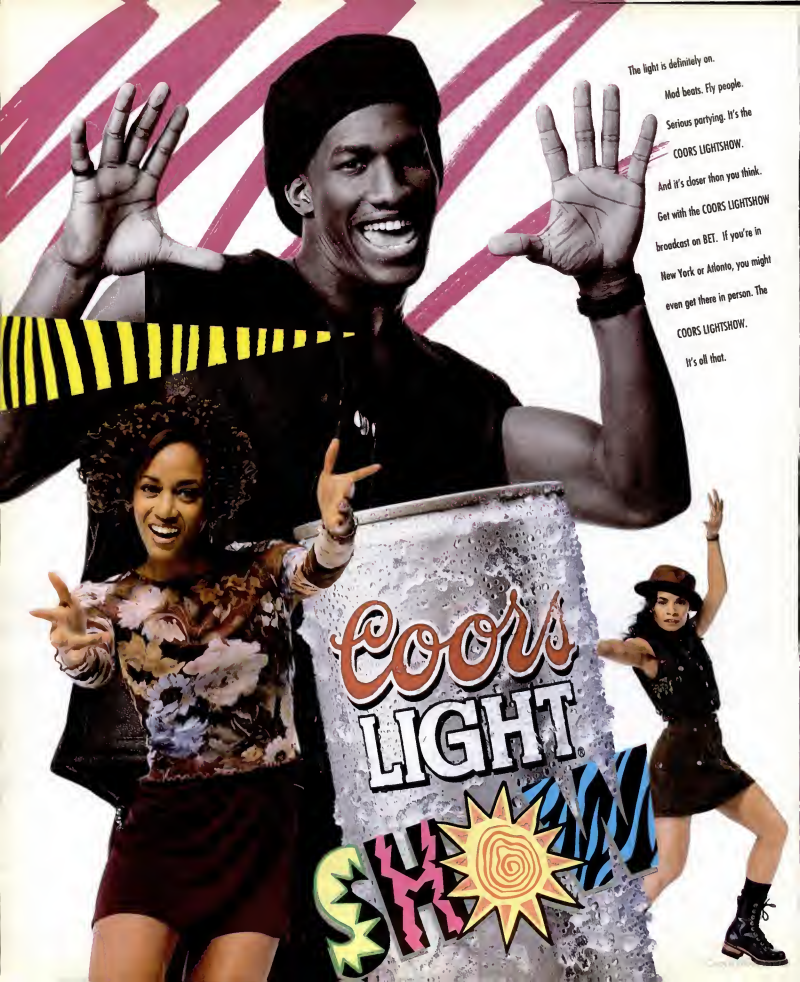
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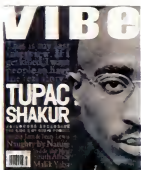
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TUPAC SHAKUR: THE FINAL CHAPTER

We received an overwhelming response to the VIBE Q&A with Tupac Shakur ("Ready to Live" by Kevin Powell, April). Several of the people mentioned in the interview were contacted before the story was published but declined to comment at that time. After the interview appeared, they contacted VIBE, wanting to respond to what they felt were misconceptions that arose from some of Tupac's statements and descriptions. Here are excerpts from their replies, as told to Fab 5 Freddy.

ANDRE HARRELL:

That night when I went to the studio, there were three sessions going on. There was Little Shawn's session, then upstairs SWV was happening, and on the other floor Biggie Smalls [The Notorious B.I.G.] was doing his thing. Hope was in the air and success was all around. Everybody was all excited about Pac comin' in, but we were starting to get antsy because he was supposed to get there at a certain time, and we wanted to see how this song with Little Shawn was going to set off.

When he got off the elevator, we were all standing in the hall. Tupac was just bopping back and forth saying, "I was set up." At first I didn't realize he had been shot, because he wasn't bleeding heavily from the head. It looked like he had a fight. He said, "It's not goin' down like that." I was, like, "Yo, Money, you shot. You need to sit down." He told Stretch to roll him up a spliff. He was in movie mode at this point. He did the whole James Cagney thing.

I said, "Let's call the ambulance." I was basically the one who was taking care of the police and the ambulance people. I wasn't making any calls; I was directing the studio exactly who to call, so I was talking more to Stretch because the paramedics were looking at Pac. There was no need for me to look at the wound.

I remember telling Stretch, "You got to go with him." 'Cause I wasn't trusting the police with Pac. He had too many open issues with the

was on the little terrace they got out there, smoking weed. They was looking around and they saw Stretch and Pac and all them niggas pull up. We all family, so niggas greeted each other from upstairs to downstairs. Next thing you know, everybody was, like, "Yo, Pac just got shot." So I'm on the way downstairs, no gat, to see what's up with my man. Everybody holding me back.

I get downstairs and everything's on some lockdown shit. Nobody moves. Immediately, police thought

elevator, I wasn't even there.

When I read the interview I felt like he was just stitching on everybody. I always said that he was the realest nigga in the game. I don't know what he was trying to hide, or if he was scared. I figured that with the shit he was talking in VIBE, he was just confused more than anything. You get shot and then you go to jail for something you ain't even do—that could twist a nigga's mind up.

And then the story just completely got switched around: niggas saying I set him up and I'm the one that got him shot. They're saying that my record "Who Shot Ya?" is about him. That shit is crazy.

That song was finished way before Tupac got shot. Niggas was taking little pieces of the song and trying to add it to the story, and that shit is crazy. Other niggas look at that VIBE piece, like, "Damn, Little Caesar was on the terrace. He must have been the lookout man." And it's real niggas in the streets thinking, "That's fucked up, what B.I.G. did to Tupac." I think that should be erased. Never, ever in life.

As far as with me, he always gonna be my man, even when I go see him again. But he need to just check himself. And I

"The story just completely got switched around. They're saying that my record 'Who Shot Ya?' is about him. That's crazy. That song was finished way before Tupac got shot."

police. I was feeling like something could have happened between the ride and the hospital. I ended up staying in the studio till 4 in the morning, 'cause the police interviewed everybody and wouldn't let anybody leave. I tried to call the hospital when I was walking out of the studio to see if I could go by there. They said they were looking at him and nobody could see him.

I was glad Tupac said he was basically through with the whole bad-guy image and that he wants to redirect his energy. So I guess there was some level of positivity that came out from all this. I want to go and see Pac and just talk to him, see where his head is at. 'Cause he knows what's real and what's not, and in the quietness of his mind, you know, he's dealing with all the truth. And for me, that's almost enough.

THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.:

I had a session with the Junior Mafia at Quad Studios. Little Ceez and Meno and all them

everybody in the studio was on the same floor where everything was supposed to have happened at. I saw Pac get out on a stretcher, but when he actually came out from the

want an apology. 'Cause I don't get down like that.

BOOKER:

There was a lot of people passing through the studio that night, and the word definitely got out that Tupac was on his way. We were waiting on Tupac for hours. Next thing I know, about 12:00, Tupac comes off the elevator. It looked like he just got in a scuffle. Then I seen the blood on his head. He was pacing back and forth, hysterically, talking about "Call the police, call the police." Then he looked



YOUR BEST SHOT

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"He made it seem like niggas had a plot against him. Like he was so important that everybody wanted to kill him."

at me and said, "You the only one who knew that I was coming. You must've set me up." I was, like, "Yo, you buggin', Tupac. C'mere and talk to me." He kept pacing back and forth, and saying, "Call the police." He never said to call the ambulance. When we were leaving, I saw that the cops only had one spent shell. The next day, we looked on the floor and walls of the lobby. That whole hallway is concrete and it's very small. I didn't see no holes in the wall or nothing.

In the paper he said he'd been set up, that he knew the assailants and blazey-boom. But everybody in the industry

knew that he came off the elevator saying, "You set me up." I thought me and him was some kind of friends. But I felt maybe this was a strategy for him to get around his case. And maybe I shouldn't hold him accountable for trying that strategy.

But after the VIBE interview, I seen that this nigga is using the media to get his point across and look like he had the upper hand. He made it seem like niggas had a plot against him. Like he was so important that street niggas wanted to kill him, industry niggas wanted to kill him. He's believing his rap. He's believing the movie scripts that he's played. Where he went wrong was when he tried to go to the street, and when it came down to the test, he did not hold up. He's gonna assassinate people's character, saying that niggas was crying and falling to the floor like a sack of potatoes. It just goes to show that the real coward and the real nigga that was crying was Tupac.

LITTLE SHAWN:

All I know is that Money was supposed to come and he agreed to do the song with me. When I got there, it was like a fucking party. I ain't really keen on a whole bunch of people in the studio while I'm working. I don't know how, but

everybody must have known this cat was comin'.

Then the elevator goes *ding*. Money gets off the elevator and starts yelling, "Ahh I got shot. Nigga set me up. Muthafucka shot me; they shot Tupac." The back of his head was busted open and it was bleeding all down his face. He caught everybody by surprise. For like only a split second, until the shock wore off, nobody really wanted to fuck with him because he was jumping around like an animal.

Reading the interview and being there, nothing made sense. He said Andre didn't want to look at him, Puffy didn't want to look at him. He's trying to state that nobody paid him any mind? Come on, man. I don't know this dude from a hole in the wall, and I was trying to help him. He said, "Little Shawn was crying uncontrollably." You sound like an idiot saying some dumb shit like that. When I was helping him, he didn't say, "You cryin' like a bitch. Get away from me." I was surprised that Money even had the audacity to go there. I've punched a lot of people in their mouth behind that "Little Shawn was cryin'" shit.

Then I hear everybody is saying that

I had something to do with it. And niggas on the West Coast are saying, "Yo, tell that nigga Little Shawn to be careful. Cause niggas on the West Coast is calling his name." I don't need that in my life. A lot of people go through problems with the law, and that ain't nothing to be glorified. Every time this dude gets arrested, it's in the paper because of who he is, but he's loving it. I ain't no media gangster. That dude is Media Man. He is ridiculous.

"He's believing his rap. He's believing the movie scripts that he's played. Where he went wrong was when he tried to go to the street."

The Road Kill Diaries



SEAN "PUFFY" COMBS:

Basically, the whole thing must have been a dream. We were shooting Biggie's "Warning" video, and I see one of the Bad Boy staff members on his way to Biggie's session. I knew that Biggie had a session with Junior Mafia, but I didn't know it was right around the corner. So I'm going to check B.I.G., you know what I'm saying?

When I get off the elevator at Quad, you have to stop in a reception area, and there's this Little Shawn session with Andre. So I stopped to say "What's up?" to them. I'm about to go up to Biggie's session when Pac comes out the elevator and he's shot up. He had some blood coming out of his head, but there wasn't a lot of blood. He was holding his groin area and limping a little bit.

Nobody turned their backs on him; niggas was all up on him. Immediately, Andre was, like, "Oh my God, call the ambulance." Tupac wanted to go to the phone, so me and my man Groovy Lou was by his side, trying to hold him up, getting him to calm down. He was telling Groovy Lou to roll him a blunt. He definitely brought the theatrics to it.

He got a lot of people in a lot of bullshit with that interview. The way it

was written, it was open-ended, like me and B.I.G. and Andre had something to do with it. I would never, ever purposefully try to hurt no next man. That man had his own beefs with niggas. I ain't never had no beef with that man.

I hope that his Thug Life shit is really over. But on the real, if you gonna be a motherfuckin' thug, you gotta live and die a thug, you know what I'm sayin'? There ain't no jumpin' in and out of thugism. If that's what you choose to do, you gotta go out like that. I ain't no thug. Only thugs I know is dead or in jail. Or about to be.

Even still, I ain't got no beef. I pray for him, and it's all good. I'm writing him a letter. I want to hear what he's thinking face-to-face. Out of everybody, I'm the easiest to forgive. I've been there where the whole press is against you, the world ain't understanding you, niggas don't know what really went on. And you get confused. That's the only thing I can see is confusion.

STRETCH:

Me and Pac have been down from day one. Before he died *Juice*, before his first album. That's my man. So the interview he did in VIBE bugged me out. But I

know him. He likes to talk a lot.

Especially when he's upset, he'll say shit that he won't even mean. And then he'll think about it later and be, like, "Damn, why the fuck did I say that?"

We was kinda skeptical when we was going to the studio. We was, like, Shit don't seem right, something gonna

happen. But when the four of us got to the studio and seen Little Caesar and them up in the window, it kinda threw us off. So we get around the corner and we see this nigga standing in front of the studio with an army fatigue jacket on. He sees us, looks at his watch, then looks down. There's somebody sitting inside by the elevators lookin' at his

newspaper. We not really paying them no mind. So they buzz us in, and the kid that was standing in front of the building comes in behind us. We wasn't rushing to the elevator. They had the iron out immediately. They had the drop on us real quick, and they was, like, "Y'all niggas lay down."

"I hope that his Thug Life thing is really over. But on the real, if you gonna be a thug, you gotta live and die a thug, you know what I'm sayin'? There ain't no jumpin' in and out of thugism."

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We just looked at each other like we was not laying down for shit. 'Cause when niggas tell you to lay down, you automatically think you ain't gonna get up no more.

So Pac turns around like he about to go for his joint, 'cause Pac was strapped. Then a shot went off, and it was, like, Oh shit. Niggas is not play-

June 8

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ing. After the shot, boom, Pac hit the floor. Me personally, I only heard one shot. I didn't hear four, five, six shots. And he was saying that he got shot three, four times. None of us remember hearing four, five shots. When the shot went off, that's when we went down.

Pac's saying all this shit in the interview, like, "I thought that Stretch was gonna fight. He was towering over them." Now, that nigga know I ain't never going out like no bitch. But I ain't dumb. I ain't got no gun, what the fuck am I supposed to do? I might be towering over niggas, but I ain't towerin' over no slugs.

Tupac got shot trying to go for his shit. He tried to go for his gun, and he made a mistake on his own. But I'll let him tell the world that. I ain't even going to get into it all like that. Pac's talking about niggas "dropping like a sack of potatoes." How the fuck is he going to know if niggas dropped like a sack of potatoes if he was turned around to get his joint? He tried to turn around and pull the joint out real quick, but niggas caught him. Grabbed his hand when it was by his waist.

When Pac was on the floor, his head was bleeding and his eyes was closed. Your man gets dropped and he falls right next to you—that shit bug you the fuck out. The other nigga kept the joint on me and Zane, and the kid with the army fatigue jacket started takin' off Pac's jewels and shit. He was calling Pac a bitch-ass nigga, kickin' him and shit.

After they finished robbing, they stepped out, walking backward and pointing the guns at us. I was looking at Pac, and all of a sudden his eyes opened and he said, "Yo, I'm hit." And Fred's saying he's hit too. So, boom, we go outside and Pac starts screaming for the police. We see a cop outside, rolling up real slow, but Zane got the other gun that Pac had, and we out on Times Square. So we ran back inside and got on the elevator and went upstairs. My man Fred stayed down there in front of the building, 'cause he was hit.

In that interview, Pac was talking all that shit about Thug Life is ignorance and telling niggas' names and all that shit. I don't even understand why he went there. I've seen Pac mad times after the shooting and he never kicked none of that shit to me. You know how he feels about the media, so why would he go and do an interview like that? He's supposed to be a street nigga; he should've kept it in the street. I mean, niggas had to go and get their names changed. I want him to get a reality check. Recognize what the fuck he's doing. Niggas on the street live by rules, man. And that rule right there, that's a rule that's never to be broken.



I want to give you much thanks for Scott Poulson-Bryant's Will Smith/Martin Lawrence cover story "Flippin' the Script" [May]. Will Smith is, has been, and always will be one of the very best entertainers. I, along with the rest of the country, have watched him grow up through his music and on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. I admire how he comes off so real and down-to-earth every time I see him, and I'm glad that he is getting more and more movie roles—he's one helluva actor. I hope this "bad boy" sticks around for a long time! Keep vibin'! To anyone who hasn't seen *Bad Boys*, that's your loss.

ALFREDO VARELA JR.
DALLAS, TX

Thank you for the article on Slick Rick da Ruler [Captive Ruler: The MC

Story," May]. My main man Ghetto did a bang-up job by allowing the cream of knowledge to rise to the top. He gave the readers the truth that wasn't mentioned in the major media, both in 1990 and presently.

RODGER YOUNG JR.
EAST POINT, GA

Kevin Powell's interview with Dr. bell hooks ["Uncut Funk," May] provided some of the most interesting reading I've had this year. I did not necessarily agree with all Dr. hooks's comments—but the sheer clarity and incisiveness of her statements left me salivating for more flavor. Most impressive were Dr. hooks's comments about the interaction between black men and women. This article should be required reading for all black men in this country.

KEVIN M. DAMES
NEW YORK, NY

VIBE encourages mail and photographs from readers. Please send letters to VIBE MAIL, 205 Lexington Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, N.Y. 10016. Send photos to VIBE YOUR BEST SHOT (same address). Include your full name, address, and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. Photo submissions will become the property of VIBE and will not be returned.

For more information on David Lamb's book *Do Plátanos Go Wit' Collard Greens?*, mentioned in our June/July issue, please call I Write What I Like Press at 800-247-6553.

CORRECTION
In the May book review of Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, the character Lauren Olamina was misidentified as a scavenger addicted to the drug pyro.

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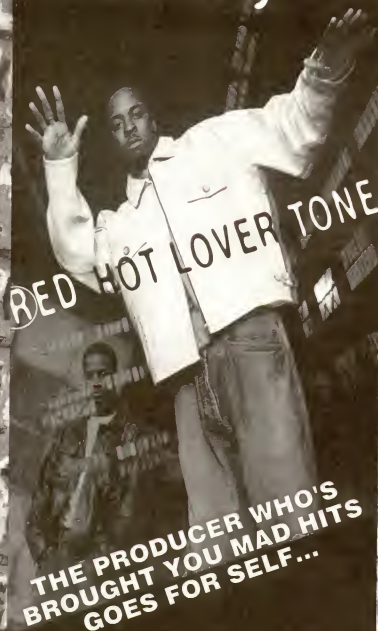
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By Kevin Powell

In his 1980 book *The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler (one of Newt Gingrich's buddies) spoke of the "crack-up of the nation," asserting that as our country's ruling class tightened its economic belt, regular Americans would feel the pinch and various blocs would arise, expressing—sometimes in extreme ways—a mass sense of alienation.

So you have to figure that the Oklahoma City bombing was merely the first climax of a story line being created by the rhetoric of the right. Capturing the killers was not the issue; what is the issue is that the bombers—along with the rise of right-wing militias, Newt Gingrich's Contract With America, Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein's *The Bell Curve*, and the Rush Limbaughs and G. Gordon Liddy's of the sand—are part of a movement bent on casting white men as victims. They didn't need a bomb to declare war on welfare mothers, affirmative action advocates, illegal immigrants, the hip hop nation, and anyone else whom they perceive as roadblocks to their "American Way."

But by choosing to promote intolerance rather than understanding, we're left at the mercy of those who can, and will, redefine American "democracy." Consequently, blacks and whites will continue to eye each other suspiciously, straight people will continue to fear and harass gay people, the rich will continue to get richer and the underclass will continue to balloon, Americans will continue to distrust "foreigners," men will continue to blame women for their problems, and many of the social and civil gains of the past 25 years will continue to be chipped away.

That the right wing refuses to acknowledge its contribution to the tearing of America's social fabric is not surprising. As long as its rhetoric stirs up an audience, more tragedies will come. As always, it is not until "the chickens come home to roost" that people will finally realize that finger-pointing is divisive—and deadly.

Edited by Cory Johnson



"All dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all." —Ralph Ellison

Unidentified woman holding injured child at the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, Oklahoma City, April 19

START

Ten Years of Priority Records

1988: Eazy-E's Ruthless Records signed. *Eazy-Duz-It* and N.W.A.'s *Straight Outta Compton* both go double platinum.



1985: *Kings of Rap* is released.

1987: Priority acquires California Raisins rights, and album with "I Heard It Through the Grapevine" goes platinum.



1991: N.W.A.'s *Efil4aggin* catapults to No. 1 (thanks to *Billboard*'s new SoundScan ranking system).

1990: Ice Cube's solo *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* and N.W.A.'s *100 Miles and Runnin'* go platinum.



1995: First movie, *Friday*, released; sound-track hits No. 1. Ice Cube/Dr. Dre re-union in the works.



1994: Sam Kinison's post-mortem *Live From Hell* and the litigious *Street Fighter* soundtrack released.

1992: Rap compilation *Street Soldiers*, a response to L.A. riots, raises \$25,000 for non-profit Community Build Inc.



1989: Album by 15-year-old Big Lady K. flops.

1986: More compilations released, including *Rap's Greatest Hits*.

After 10 years in the rap game, Priority Records president Bryan Turner has revealed the secret to his label's success: "We do not censor our artists, and we never ask for lyric sheets." According to SoundScan, this Hollywood-based independent label has grown from a \$3-million-a-year company in 1985 to its current \$80 million size, making it one of the biggest indies in the country. Unlike other old-timers like Tommy Boy and DefJam, it has never signed a distribution deal with the majors.

The Canadian-born Turner founded the label after his old employer, K-Tel, went bankrupt. Turner wanted to follow K-Tel's lead, releasing compilations, and focused on the latest genre: rap. "We didn't sit down and decide to have a rap label," says Turner. "We just knew we were appealing to kids who are aggressive buyers."

Priority's first hit was *Kings of Rap*, which featured tracks by hip hop pioneers Run-D.M.C., the Fat Boys, and Whodini, among others. But Turner also showed genius by squeezing sales of more than 1 million albums out of the then popular television ad fea-

turing the California Raisins. A year later, Turner met Eric "Eazy-E" Wright, who was looking for a production deal for his Ruthless Records and his group N.W.A. With other labels afraid to release the group's gangsta rap, Turner met with the group and was convinced their material was genuine, and refused to censor their content. Says Ice Cube, "I would've quit rapping in the music business before I would ever revise or change my lyrics."

When N.W.A. started to split, Priority managed to sign Ice Cube as a solo artist and keep a piece of Dr. Dre's subsequent efforts, including the 1993 megahit *The Chronic*. And those successes paved the way for an offshoot of the label devoted to heavy metal, and for Priority Films, which coproduced *Friday*, Ice Cube's new movie. The label promises a new Ice-T album and the widely rumored Ice Cube and Dr. Dre reunion, *Helter Skelter*. "When we're perched atop of those charts and looking down at all the huge companies with unlimited dollars that they spend," says Turner, "it's a great feeling. It's addictive—and we need to keep doing it."

Elliott Wilson

bullets point-blank news



AIDS AIDS

The Notorious B.I.G., L.L. Cool J., Heavy D, Run-D.M.C., Salt-N-Pepa, TLC, Mary J. Blige, and numerous other artists have pledged to come together for Urban Aid, an all-day concert to benefit the AIDS charity Lifebeat, at New York's Madison Square Garden on October 5. Organized by Uptown Records president Andre Harrell (left) to heighten awareness of AIDS among "heterosexual, around-the-way guys" in the wake of Eazy-E's death, the event will be simulcast on MTV and BE1.



WHO'S BAD?

Michael Jackson's *History* may not be as lascivious as a Luke record, but it sure seems rough enough to merit a parental-advisory sticker. Despite a sprinkling of profanity—don't miss Michael snarling "Stop fucking with me!" on the album version of "Scream"—and a passing marijuana reference from guest the Notorious B.I.G., however, Epic Records opted not to use the familiar warning label on the King of Pop's newest release. According to an Epic spokesperson, "The issue was never even considered."

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Before you celebrate, celebrate.

START



Voting With Your Feet

Vans is finally bringing back the nastiest sneakers on the street—and they don't even know what they'll look like. Back in the day, skateboarders could custom-order ugly-ass tennies from the Van Doren Rubber Company in Orange County, Calif., mixing stripes, soles, even their own fabric—be it a piece of Mom's old drapes or an old T-shirt—for truly loathsome loafers.

But as Van Doren blew up, becoming the publicly traded Vans, Inc. in 1991, they ditched the program to focus on new products. Old-schoolers protested, and in April the design-your-own-kicks operation was resuscitated—minus the “bring your own fabric” thing, which died because Vans couldn't guarantee durability. But there are still myriad fabrics and 20 canvas colors to choose from. “We decided to bring it back, because we realized that skaters don't want to have shoes that everyone else can buy,” says Sari Ratsula, vice president of design and product development. It takes an extra two to four weeks and 10 bucks, but hey, who said posting high style marks was easy? *Lee Crane*

bullets point-blank news



MULTIMEDIA BABY, BABY
Brandy is looking to the small screen to develop a multimedia one-two punch. After wrapping a tour with Boyz II Men, Brandy, 16, will star in *Mo'Nisha*, a half-hour sitcom pilot that Big Ticket Television is producing for CBS. “The character *Mo'Nisha* is just like me,” says Brandy, who uses her last name, Norwood, when acting. “She's smart, she doesn't take anything off of anybody, she's not scared to say what she has to say, she's positive, and she's classy.”



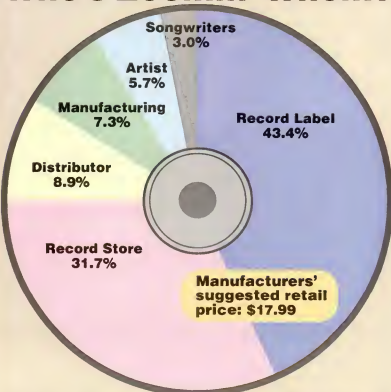
CALL HIM PRINCE
Bushwick Bill, the diminutive original member of the Geto Boys, has changed his name to coincide with the release of his solo album *Phantom of the Rapra*. Bill will now be known as Dr. Wolfgang Von Bushwickin the Barbarian Mother Funky Stay High Dollar Billstir. Why the change? “I had to upgrade my former name to show some expansion,” says the artist formerly known as Bill. “And to show everybody who the biggest Geto Boy of all is.”

The Craziest Clothier

Regardless of the fate of their new album, Naughty by Nature's custom clothing line is breaking into uncharted retail territory with their Naughty Gear Inc. store at 106 Halsey Street in Newark. Along with their trademark baseball-batted sweatshirts, boxers, and sheets, the line has expanded to include lunch boxes, towels, pens, and dice. On the J. Crew tip, they'll continue to sell through a mail-order catalog and now even shorts can be naughty, thanks to Naughty Kids children's gear. *OJ Lima*



Who's Zoomin' Whom?



The record biz grossed \$10 billion in 1993, according to the Recording Industry Association of America. An industry weasel leaked us the following breakdown of where the money spent on a CD goes. Now we're wondering, Who's really getting paid? *Josh Tyrangiel*

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START Ask the Rap Bandit

Everything you always wanted to know about hip hop but were afraid to ask



Q: What religion do you belong to? H.M.S., TAMPA, FL

A: Like KRS-One, I'm a devout believer in HEAL.

Q: What's your favorite hip hop album, group, and 12-inch? R.D., QUEEN'S VILLAGE, NY

A: My favorite album is *Revenge of da Bad Boyz* by the Almighty RSO, my favorite 12-inch is "Hellbound" by the Almighty RSO, and my favorite group is the Almighty RSO. Oops, wait a minute, forget that. I keep forgettin' that I'm not at *The Source* anymore.

Q: Why do rappers and industry types get to have all the fun, and us fans don't get invited? For example, at the

after-parties you see in magazines, only rappers be there. K.A., LOS ANGELES, CA

A: Party scene regulars like myself know that the hip hop club scene is not all good. I mean, sure the hotties look great, but it's mostly just rappers standing around posing. But as long as they continue to tip good, I'll keep sticking to be the best washroom attendant I can be.

Q: What once respected rapper has fallen off the most? J.C.H., MYSTIC, CT

A: The artist formerly known as the Fresh Prince

Q: I am 13 years old. Eazy-E was my favorite rapper. One time I wrote him and he sent me back a picture with his signature on it. It was the greatest thing a rapper ever did

for me. J.J., NEW IBERIA, LA

A: Until a few days later, when the bill from Jerry Heller arrived.

Q: Do you think the D.O.C. will ever do another album? A.P., MADISON, OH

A: Possibly, but his record company's waiting to see how Slick Rick's new album sells first. They want to determine if there really is a market out there for tracks made five years ago.

Q: On N.W.A.'s "Compton's N the House," "who are they dissin'" when they talk about the "sneaky sneaky record with a sneaky sneaky crew?" D.C., DETROIT, MI

A: Their onetime L.A. rival Chunky A.

Q: Have you played *RapJam*, the new video game about hip hop? L.V., BALTIMORE, MD

A: Once, but I didn't really like it. They should have made it less about basketball and more about the world of hip hop. I wanna play a video game where the citizens of Rap Land fend off an invasion from yet another single off Coolio's album.

Q: Are Aaliyah and R. Kelly planning to have any children together? B.H., COLUMBUS, OH

A: Wait, I thought R. Kelly was married to Brandy.

Q: Besides the money, what's the best part about being back in the hip hop game? V.B., BOULDER, CO

A: It's great to be receiving free stuff again from the record companies. I was starting to look pretty tired walking around in a T-shirt that said SHOOP.

Q: What was that on Method Man's eye in the "Bring the Pain" video? D.M.A., SEATTLE, WA

A: A condom, of course.

Q: What's up with *Naughty's* album? N.B., EAST HANOVER, NJ

A: Musically it's cool, but I think the group is beginning to feel the wear and tear of having to come up with a new national catchphrase every two years. Plus, Treach is starting to run out of tools.

Get a question about hip hop? Send it to: The Rap Bandit, P.O. Box 40382, Philadelphia, PA 19144

Eazy Comes, Eazy Goes

"He's probably not resting in peace even though he's in the ground," said Tomica Woods Wright, 26, Eric "Eazy-E" Wright's visibly pregnant widow, to a phalanx of reporters while standing outside the Los Angeles County Superior Court on May 8. She's right—Eazy's resting in pieces as the remnants of his estimated \$15 million legal corpus are being exhumed and picked apart by family, former business associates, and ex-lovers.

Since March 26, when the N.W.A. cofounder and Ruthless Records chief died from AIDS, Michael Klein, director of business affairs at Ruthless, has challenged the

deathbed agreement naming Woods and her lawyer, Ron Sweeney, as trustees of Eazy's estate. Klein also alleges that Wright signed over half of the company to him in 1992, and that money is missing from a Ruthless bank account to which Woods and Sweeney had access.

The doors to the company's Woodland Hills offices have been padlocked, and none of the artists or employees associated with the label—nor any of Eazy's seven children—have received any payments since his death. Says Woods, "The lawyers are the ones taking all the money."

Cheo H. Coker



bullets point-blank news



IF YOU CAN'T WIN

Computer hacker Kevin Lee Poulsen didn't invent cheating, but he's sure got it dialed. Poulsen concocted a way to block radio station phone lines during promotional contests. With his competition eliminated, he'd call up and cash in; in the past four years, he won two Porches, \$22,000 in giveaways, and at least two trips to Hawaii from three Los Angeles stations. But in April, his number came up: Poulsen was sentenced to 51 months in jail and ordered to pay more than \$58,000 in restitution to the stations.



NONE FOR ALL?

The Brand Nubian reunion announced last summer at Rock Steady Park has been kicked to the curb. The planned album would have reunited Grand Puba with Sadat X and Lord Jamar, but Jamar and Puba can't resolve personal differences, so Sadat X and Puba are each working on solo joints. "The beef is mainly between Jamar and Puba," says Alamo, who helped produce the group's 1990 hip hop classic, *One for All*. "So now everyone's doing what they gotta do."



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leap.

you
float.

you
spin.

you
pump.

you
take care of
business.

you
land.

maybe.

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START

Me (and Her) Against the World

Cue the "Wedding March" sample: Tupac Shakur, once rap's ruling bachelor, is getting around no more. On April 29, Shakur wedded longtime girlfriend Keisha Morris in upstate New York's Clinton Correctional Facility, where the rapper is serving 18 months to four and a half years for sexual abuse. Attendance was limited by prison officials, but Morris's mother and a cousin of Tupac witnessed the ceremony.



Morris and Shakur met over a year earlier in a New York club, and had wedding plans before Tupac's November '94 trial (in which he was accused of raping a woman he'd met in a different New York club). Morris, a prelaw student, apparently wasn't dismayed by Tupac's incarceration and previous brushes with the law. "The way they feel about each other hasn't changed, despite the circumstances," says a source close to both parties. "They believe in each other, and they believe they'll have a bright future together." *Josh Tyrangiel*

Bobbito Garcia plays the tracks;

No doubt Dionne Farris will be singing for the rest of her life. It was a joy to meet someone so talented and young who understands her craft so well. My roommate put me up on "Food for Thought" (from her album *Wild Seed—Wild Flower*) a while ago 'cause I'm a sucker for ballads, but I

have potential to be good singers, but they're following an example of those who had no example. It's like the blind leading the blind. If you play bass or trumpet, you have to practice. Your voice is your instrument. Singing lessons could help a lot of them 'cause they can carry a tune,

Steps to Perfection

DF: It's all right. I like more theme-oriented rap like Tribe or Ahmad. I like the art of rapping but don't like when you say a lot of words without a lot of meaning. I like really creative stuff.

B: See, this is the really creative stuff. Lyrically, it's a progressive song: complex delivery and metaphorical. The people who will appreciate this are rap purists who really pay attention to lyrics and want to hear something new.

DF: I see. I appreciate innovation in my genre of music too.

* "ANNIE" SOUNDTRACK—"Tomorrow"
DF: Hoo, ha ha ha hal Oh, that's cold, who put you on this? Who?

B: I heard a story about you singing "Betcha bottom dollar" in a car.

DF: We did this play in high school and I was Annie. I didn't want to be Annie, but when I auditioned, my teacher wanted me to. It was controversial, 'cause my school was predominantly white and some of the parents were, like, "She's black; she can't be Annie." Annie has red hair, but I wore a huge Afro wig!

B: Did you funk up the songs?
DF: No, I did it pretty straight, but I should've, right? When I went onstage with red patent leather shoes, red dress, and the Afro wig, the crowd just started screaming, "Ahhhh!" It was really funny.

B: You should do a cover of it for your next album!

couldn't believe Dionne's diversity—from Arrested Development's first album all the way to blowing up with the single "I Know." Whatever course she chooses, my ears will definitely be pleased.

* RUFUS FEATURING CHAKA KHAN—"Ain't Nobody"

DF: Is this the Greatest Hits?

B: No, it's a live recording from the Savoy.

DF: Is it? Get outta here.

B: That's a credit to her that she can record live and sound that good.

DF: I remember singing this in my room, trying to get the power behind her voice. Chaka, Patti LaBelle—they're ridiculous. I was always so amazed at how much power they could produce without sounding like they were straining.

B: "Ain't nobody loves me better than you..." Is there anybody in your life that you can say that to?

DF: No, unfortunately, not right now—ha ha ha ha!

* TOTAL FEATURING THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.—"Can't You See"

DF: To be honest—not to dis them—but a lot of young singers, male and female, coming out today

but can they put it in the bucket?

* LENNY KRAVITZ—"Heaven Help"

DF: I like him. I know some people who don't 'cause his influences are so obvious, like the Beatles, etc. But

sound check

everyone's influenced by somebody.

B: He worked on your album, right?

DF: Not physically. A friend of mine sampled his "Freedom Train," but I'm indifferent about sampling. I'm confused about how creative it is to just use someone else's creation. I don't think I'll do it again.

* BIGG JUS FEATURING EL-P—"8

Dionne Farris states the facts

bullets point-blank news



RUMP SHAKERS

Does your booty make Sir Mix-A-Lot think twice? If so, you might want to get to the video store and pick up *The Grind* (or as *Real-World*-alum-cum-musclehead-host Eric Nies calls it, "The Groined") *Workout! Hip Hop Aerobics*. The life-impact workout led by Eric and *The Grind* dancers features music from Des'ree, Cypress Hill, and other heavyweights, as well as a "special abdominal" routine. Can Puck's Buns, Thighs, and Loogeys be far behind?



CONTRACT ON AMERICA

Just in case you wondered which side he was on, Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich dissed rap in the March 20 issue of *Broadcasting & Cable*. "I think rap music that encourages the raping and mutilation of women is sick and should not be on the air," says Gingrich. "But every time I talk to lawyers and try to find a clever way to stop it, I'm told unequivocally that the courts will never tolerate it." Gingrich also suggested that advertisers pull their ads from rap radio stations.

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BOUNCING 1. Gerald Levert, on the set of a *Dark and Natural* commercial in Atlanta, goes over the storyboards with high school senior Leslie Whyly, who helped develop the campaign. 2. Looks like Xscape's Tameka Cottle and Tamika Scott just kicked it a little too hard. 3. Johnny Gill (as he rubs his ear the right way) works on his new album in L.A. 4. The queens of reinvention, supermodels Naomi Campbell and Linda Evangelista. 5. At Debbie Allen's post-Academy Awards party at L.A.'s Georgia Restaurant, everyone has on their best party gear, including actresses Jasmine Guy and Gigi Hunter. (6.) Allen tries to look interested while Wesley Snipes talks her ear off. (7.) Lynn Whitfield and Maryland congressman Kwesi Mfume try to ignore Denzel Washington. 8. Russell Simmons and Patti LaBelle at the front row of designer Donna Karan's fall fashion show. 9. During a performance at N.Y.C.'s Tramps, missions realizes her nail polish has chipped. 10. Is Monica taking it personal with Kay Gee? 11. Two of the best hairdos in hip hop: Coolio and Dru Down at the 1995 A&G Superfest in Irwindale, Calif. 12. Funkdooiest beneath prophetic statement in Times Square. 13. Malik Yoba plays the heck out of that guitar at Tramps. 14. Even though no one knew what the hell he was talking about on Craig Mack's "Flava in Ya Ear" remix, the hip hop world anxiously awaits a new L.L. album. Now that L.L.'s managed by Bad Boy Entertainment, will Puffy appear in all his videos? 15. Ras Kass gets busy on the mike (and a bottle of booze) at San Francisco's DNA Lounge. 16. Heavy D with Chilli and T-Boz. Wonder if they gave him a double "Red Light Special"? 17. Ol' Dirty Bastard shimmy-shimmy-ya's with his wife, Mrs. Shaquitta, at Glam Slam in Los Angeles.

Mimi Valdes



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BIG BABY 1. All-Stars Patrick Ewing, Rosie Perez, and Magic Johnson at Mickey Mantle's Restaurant in New York. 2. Who told Subway that it would be fly to pose in front of a subway station? Talk about predictable! 3. Dope producer Buckwild meditating in front of his record collection. 4. Changing Faces keep it right there with Shao Lin's King just. No word on whether they stroked it up and down. 5. Freak like me. Adina Howard gives us her version of the hip hop James Bond girl. 6. Since Deion Sanders and Eric B. are hanging out, could it mean they're recording a single together? That could be the worst hip hop collaboration since New Kids on the Block got with Nice & Smooth. 7. Wonder if preppy Ralph Lauren saw supermodel Tyson Beckford's tattoo before signing him to an exclusive contract? 8. Models Beverly Peelle and Cynthia Bailey show off their fabulousness at Teen's 20th birthday party in N.Y.C. 9. Pevin Campbell can't say "Goodbye" to Brandy. And if he's lucky, maybe she'll be down. 10. Smif-N-Wessun demonstrate their "Bucktown" dance. 11. Montell Jordan and Smooth show how they do it. Maybe someone needs to show Smooth how to pick out dresses. 12. Chanel Live spark it up with Funkmaster Flex. 13. Those crazy New Jersey homies, Naughty by Nature's Treach and Winnie, let the crowd hear the new flow at the record-release party for their *New Jersey* soundtrack. 14. Paris is burning at San Francisco's Hotel Ana. *M.V.*

[illegible]

GIORGIO BRUTINI



19

95

work life don't let life
work You.



GBX

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Boy, maybe we your worst nightmare — nigga-born serial killers!

T-Square, look! It's a time machine ...!

JACKED 2 DA FUTURE

BY MORALES & BAKER

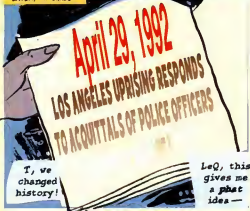
NO PLEASE DON'T!

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ARMED WITH THEIR DUFFEL BAG OF WEAPONS AND THE VIBE BLACK HISTORY CALENDAR, THE HAPPY COUPLE TOOK A JOYRIDE INTO YESTERDAY!



"LATER," IN LIMBO —



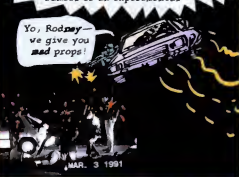
JULY, 1991 — AFTER A SIMILAR, BUT FAILED, ATTEMPT TO "REASON WITH" **MILLIE MORTON** —

Sorry, Champ, but I know you don't wanna be messing with Desiree Washington!

This time leave **The Koran** in his jacket so we don't gotta come back!



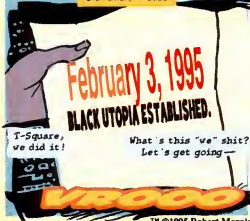
— exclusive videotape shows the dramatic attack on L.A.'s finest by the UFO. A Pentagon spokesman has already denied the rumors of an experimental —



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"EVEN LATER," IN LIMBO —



Oh Jesus God! Oh God, we're not moving!

LeQuette, shut the fuck up! Gotta think, what coulda gone wrong — **ah shit.**



What? What?!

Maybe crazy niggas like us can't belong there! Maybe we a **Black Utopia's** worst nightmare ...!

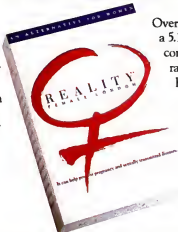




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NO CONTRACEPTIVE IS EFFECTIVE IF IT IS NOT USED. AFTER ALL, UNPROTECTED SEX HAS A PREGNANCY (UNWANTED) RATE OF 25% OVER A YEAR'S TIME.

*TYPICAL USE FAILURE RATES	& AVOIDANCE	1 YEAR
REALITY FEMALE CONDOM	12	25
MALE LATEL CONDOM	8	15
CONDOM GAP	10	18
DIAPHRAGM	8	15
SPRIN	12	17
UNPROTECTED SEX	61	85

START STIX & STÖNZ

I think it's time to draw first blood. I'm appalled by George Steinbrenner's threats to yank the Yankees out of the Bronx! I know that y'all brut'az an' sist'uhz out of state don't give a damn, but we do! I was born and sworn to the Bronx, plus I love sports. Nothing beats a long game of stickball on Mohegan Avenue and Southern Boulevard. Double-parked cars always provided a seat for happy onlookers and preschool book-ing agents. After the game, it would rain and clean the streets for our annual skee-ly tournament. But now it's the big leagues, and we ride the iron horse to the home of the brave, and get off at a buck sixty-one and River Avenue, den of the New York Yankees.

Steinbrenner should be payin' us for letting him run our team as long as he has. He's getting off easier than Butterfuc. In short, he's a traitor. A lot of fans in other cities were too mad about the strike to even think about coming back; our stadium was one of the only ones in the country that was packed on opening day. Too bad you missed it, George. It was a really good show. Now you say you'll move the team to New Jersey, or maybe the Upper West Side (I can see it now: ballpark franks with Grey Poupon). All because there's a little crime in the old neighborhood. Big deal While he's courting City Hall calls from the mayor, Rudy "Fool-iani," George oughta be paying more respect to us, the ones who pay his rent.

Pepperidge Farm remembers. I ain't tryin' to get mushy or anything, but I was 10 years old when I first went to a Yankee game. Can't really explain it; it was just a thrill. "Play ball!" The smell of spilled beer on the stairs in 103-degree weather meant a game. Imagine enjoying a contest between Boston and the Bronx. A classic matchup indeed—plus it was Bat Day! Step right up to the

window and get your ticket, grab a Louisville Slugger, and take position. You'll see big 'n' little kids knock the heads off anyone who dares wear a Red Sox cap. I love this game! The stadium was jammed to the top of the upper deck with bat-swinging, do-or-die-hard fans, flippin' to catch foul balls. Pandemonium! You'll laugh seeing the cops beat down drunken fans. You'll cry hearing Frank sing "Nueva York!"—and wait! Fireworks! Yeah, and hot dogs too, with real mustard. Hip hop hooray! Holy cow! The Yankees win the pennant!

Afterward, you could go to the park and do like the pros. It was the sunniest day I've ever seen, out there with

How could you strike when you're getting paid to play games? Let's put the cards on the table! How many of you have lost the thrill of the game? Which game, did you say? The one you forgot to play. This year, the only shit on TV was football and Jack Nicklaus. I only root for the Palermo Godfathers, and I hate golf! It's not just the owners or players, it's Ticketmaster! I don't like ordering tickets over the phone like fried rice. Furthermore, I don't want no MSG Network in my soup—too many additives and preservatives.

These discounts don't mean dogshit! First you strike for more money, then you try to lure us into a coupon-cutting Key

I'm picking up my bat and blatin' all hard rocks off the Field of Fake Dreams and Get-Rich Schemes!



my Graig Nettles bat surrounded by a field of clovers. Hey, George! What happened? When did you become an enemy of the Bronx? What did we ever do to you, except make you rich? When the disgusting greed of the owners and the players takes over the game, then it's time to stop playin'. If your name is Jordan and the strike is taking away from your game time, then you can bounce back, grab the money, and leave your lifelong dream of playin' hardball. But since Mike couldn't swing long on the green diamond, I'm picking up my bat and blatin' all hard rocks off the Field of Fake Dreams and Get-Rich Schemes! The '94-'95 sports season will always be remembered by the fans as the Year of the Career. We were cheated out of a damn good season. Everybody knows the Bronx was gonna take the flag last year!

Food sale? I'm down wit' those guys who threw money out on the field of Shea Stadium on opening day. Even the umpires could be on the take. Who's to say they're not making bogus calls on legitimate plays, just because they have a little side action going on?

Maybe one day the leagues will understand that they work hard not only for money or even for the love of the game, but as a 10-year-old kid could watch his first World Series like I did. Don't deprive the kid of heirin' Frankie belt it out through the big speakers. So help me Steinbrenner! If you break that little boy's heart and pull the Yanks out of the Bronx... I still got that bat, and I won't hesitate to fly that head. Seem like the national pastime has passed over, just like the purity of America, apple pie, and a bag of pretty beads.

This is not a game.

**STOP
PLAYIN'
BÖNZ
MALONE**

NOO

MUSIC

NOO

VYBE

NOO

TRYBE



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DRU DOWN • SHOCK G
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FEATURING THE HIT SINGLE
"I GOT 5 ON IT"



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OF THE GETO BOYS

PHANTOM OF THE RAPRA

FEATURING THE SINGLE
"WHO'S THE BIGGEST"



MAD CJ MAC

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FEATURING THE SINGLE
"COME AND TAKE A RIDE"
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START STREET SCRIP- TURES

All right, suckers. The topic I'm forced to address is the blatant ignorance that exists within society. This is for everybody—from the innocent folks who work hard for a living only to be sized up and "victimized" by some sneak thief/junkie who had a "jones comin' down," to the old lady who faithfully tends her garden only to have her daisies pissed on in the dark by some drunk idiot. Well... enough is enough. People like that old lady just ain't going to accept this bullshit anymore. "YOOU TELL 'EM, SUGAH," she states as she swings her frying pan in the affirmative. Now we will attempt to break down and destroy that troublesome void that we all know called *ignorance*. And how are we going to defeat this problem?

Well, let's ask Webster's first, just to make this creative saga official: "Destitute of knowledge or education (as in 'an ignorant society')." Damn, that's a whole lotta ignorant people. But now that I think about it, I've personally encountered a slew of ignorant people. Some were simply unenlightened, others were just plain olde *ugly*. But I'm in control of my destiny, and I can't allow anyone else's foulness to bring me down.

So tell me, which one is it? Poor levels of *comprehension*, or no appreciation for the opportunity of *education*? Or is it that other aspects of survival in your immediate environment are so overwhelming that you never seem to understand the seriousness of taking time out from the daily bullshit to find that path that leads toward basic communication skills and "rationality"? That's the only way you can function in this "New World (Dis)Order" shit that everybody talkin' 'bout.

"What the fuck does any of this New World shit have to do with hip hop culture?" So asks "Money-Grip," an anonymous reader, inquiring as I'm writing this.

Well, Mr. Money-Grip, check this out: (1) Some folks just can't comprehend the excessive usage of these so-called "cuss" words that have become entangled in the structure of the English language throughout the generations and proliferated through modern slang. These aggressive-sounding words hold

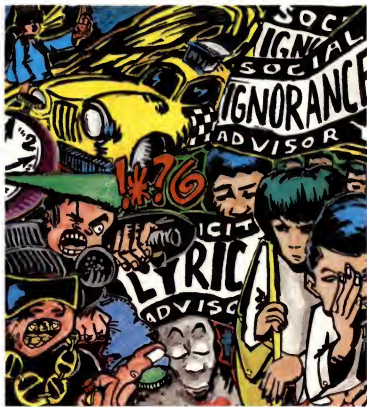
has unofficially deemed it "cool" to be fashionably ignorant.

"What are we going to do about this?" is a question that weighs on the mind of countless innocents as the world spins out of control. Perhaps we can turn our backs, but that would be foul, because we would be "igging" reality while waiting to perish. I'm not going out like that!!! Brotherman been down too long, now it's time to get up. I've come to the grand conclusion that the only way

to find the patience and self-discipline to practice it so that I may be on point too. Most people's attention span is so short that half of this article's moral content might be forgotten by the time they reach the end of this column. But this topic is so serious that I'm sure it will slap them in the back of the neck just when they least expect it. After all, ignorance is bliss, and everybody suffers while being deprived of the simplest cure in the world: love.

I've come to the grand conclusion that the only way to conquer ignorance is through LOVE—the love of self, as well as the genuine love of all God's creation, can make miracles happen.

THE DEATH OF IGNORANCE GHETTO



no power except the emphasis placed onto them from within the mind of the user. (2) In 1995 the dominant mind frame (projected through the images of popular culture) is that of the *igramamus*. The proof is certified by the countless misdirected fake idols claiming "reality" status while subconsciously worshipping death for the sake of getting paid.

Every time I notice that ugly sticker plastered on an artist's album cover, I'm reminded that the abrasive words and their users are looked upon distastefully by the so-called powers that persist. They just don't seem to understand that the average planetary citizen has absorbed so much negativity through witnessing other people cussin', whoopin', and hollerin'. But ignorance is everywhere, from weak-ass movies like *Dumb and Dumber* to real-life drama like your drunk uncle on Saturday night. In the eyes of the children, the "society elite"

to conquer ignorance is through LOVE—the love of self, as well as the genuine love of all God's creation, can make miracles happen.

No, I'm not doing a 180-degree flip into no crazy confusing "flower power" speech—Ghetto don't get down like dat—but I will tell you this: You can change the rest of the world by changing yourself. Liberate your mind from the wasteful elements in your environment and purify your thoughts. Once your thoughts are clear and you're thinking with an open mind, while exercising the knowledge of right and wrong, you'll find a complete sense of freedom from ignorance and a feeling of peacefulness with the world around you.

Yeah, I know: All this sounds good on paper. It's certainly not easy, but worth while work never is. Although I may be blessed with this knowledge to pass down to you, I myself am also struggling

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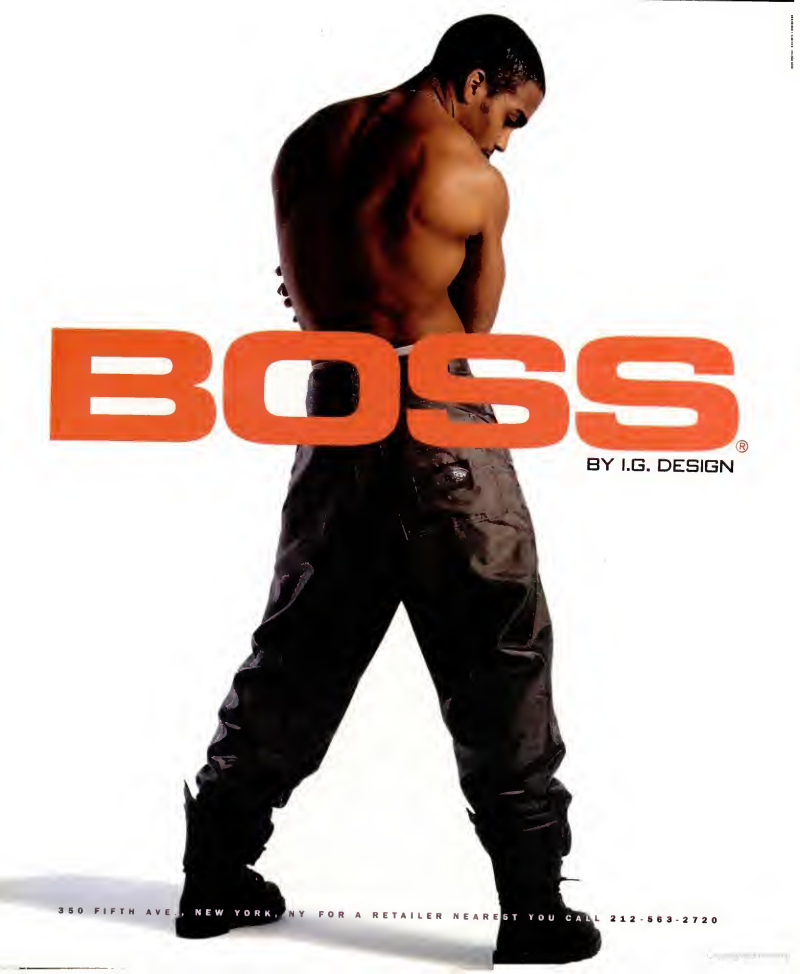

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HEATHER B.

A female rapper who's all about business

HEATHER B., FORMERLY OF KRS-ONE'S BOOGIE DOWN PRODUCTIONS CREW, IS back—and not just as a rapper. In addition to rhymin', the Jersey City stylist owns a beauty parlor, Nubian Nails and Hair, in the town's so-called artsy quarter. Her brother, cousins, Aunt Poppo, and friends braid, cut, color, and perm and run the shop for her. As for Heather, her specialty is nails—specifically, airbrushing them with ornate multicolored designs.

But don't let her ultrafemme tendencies fool you.

Miss B. is strictly hardcore. "Jeans and ruggies" are her uniform, she says, leaning forward on a metal folding chair and pounding her left fist into her right palm. She's definitely down with the "keepin' it real" crew. If you remember, Heather B. was one of the costars of MTV's first *The Real World* series in 1992: She was the sister who clocked a journalist at a party for insulting her.

While a couple of her suitmates catapulted to fame immediately following the program, Heather's career didn't quite take off. "I was sitting in my apartment with no lights and no phone," she says. "It was no joke!" She signed a talent development deal with MTV, but her show never materialized. Heather got paid anyway and used the money to open her beauty parlor in October 1993. Next she returned to the studio and started shopping her music around, but was told that "record companies weren't trying to sign female rappers."

Undeterred, Heather eventually pumped out her own hardcore single, "All Glocks Down," and distributed it Wu-Tang style. "I only had enough money to get 300 records pressed," she says. "I had some bulshit mailing lists and went around to record companies." Kenny Parker, the single's producer (and KRS-One's brother), also "knew a couple of people. We mailed it out and the response was great."

All that hard work, time, and money paid off.

Heather B. now has a 12-inch deal with Pendulum Records. And she's ready to be in the spotlight once again. "We feel good about that," she says. "We feel real good about that. Word up!"

Ipseleng Kgositsile

OMAR

The sound and soul of the streets

DURING LONDON'S SUMMER OF 1990, ONE record captured the city's chilled-out, return-to-roots vibe to a tee. Omar's independent release "There's Nothing Like This," with its soothing, seductive melody and wonderfully hypnotic bass, signaled a resounding triumph for the British street soul scene. The single crashed onto the pop charts and sent major labels clamoring to sign up similar, sensual-singing black artists.

After this explosive entrée, the British music media was trumpeting the commercial breakthrough of homegrown soul acts. At the forefront, everyone cited Omar, a classically trained musician and vocalist with a Jamaican/Chinese father and Jamaican/Indian mother who'd spent most of his life at school in the southeastern English city of Canterbury.

Today, 25-year-old Omar Lye-Fook looks back on that time with considerable glee. "Coming out through my father's independent label [Kongo Dance] was all about doing my own thing," he says. "I just tried to keep on that black street level."

Following the success of "There's Nothing Like This," Omar was quickly snapped up by Talkin' Loud records. Then came three months of intense production for a follow-up album, *Music*, released in 1992. It marked a clear progression from the spartan debut, this time blending live strings, percussion, and brass. Yet despite widespread critical acclaim—including a seal of approval from Stevie Wonder himself—it bombed. "Nobody heard that album," Omar says. "I had to sit and listen to arguments saying my music was too complicated."

Disappointed with his record company, Omar shopped around for a new deal and eventually signed with RCA. Intent on collaboration rather than his previous one-man approach, he teamed up with the likes of Motown songwriter Lamont Dozier, Wonder, and Marvin Gaye's arranger, Leon Ware. For *Pleasure*—Omar's third U.K. album, which features his Stateside debut single, "Saturday"—emerges with a whole new flavor that combines British and American R&B sensibilities. "Basically, I want people to listen to my music because they feel they're on that level," he says. "'Saturday' is a chill-out song. It's about the women, the smoking, and the drinking. It ain't no heavy trip—just chilled out."

Lee Harpin





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ROSIE GAINES

A socially conscious sister sings

YOU LAST HEARD ROSIE GAINES'S ARETHA-FIED ALTO DURING her short-but-starlit stint with the New Power Generation in 1991—especially on the duet "Diamonds and Pearls" with an artist who was then still named Prince. But according to Gaines, she was a diva in Oaktown long before she was introduced to the Purple Power-That-Be.

"People think that Prince discovered me," explains the confident singer/songwriter/producer. "But my band was already well known in the Bay Area. And I always made it clear to Prince that I wanted to do something on my own."

At the moment, Gaines is cooling down in a hotel room in Madrid after a red-hot set of provocative uncut funk from her long-overdue solo debut album, *Closer Than Close*.

While she admits that her post-NPG solo success is sweet, being "worldly" is nothing new to Gaines. "I grew up in a steel town outside of Oakland, but I've been practicing astral traveling for a long time," she says. "It's a form of deep meditation rooted in the Buddhist religion, when you feel like your body's asleep but your mind is awake. Some people call it the out-of-body experience."

It's no coincidence that Gaines's eclectic spirituality oozes its way into her lyrical landscape on *Closer Than Close*. While the album features torch ballads like "Slowman" (which is dedicated to her husband, Francis Jules) and funk like "I Want You," she also explores social misery with her self-penned tune "Get the Ghetto off Your Mind" and on an inspired cover of Bob Marley's prophetic "Concrete Jungle."

Now, why would a modern-day soul sister with Gaines's golden pipes remake Marley instead of the belt-or-else Aretha or Chaka Khan ballads that she grew up on? "For the lyrics! Bob's messages are still relevant today....I mean, we're all still living in concrete jungles," says Gaines, who recently relocated from Minneapolis back home to Pittsburgh, Calif. "After all, there's got to be more to R&B than partyin' till the break of dawn!"

Gordon Chambers

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PRIMO TEQUILA

NEXT

LOST BOYZ

They got flavor for days

THE LOST BOYZ ARE CHILLIN' IN AN ICE CREAM parlor, where the flavor of choice is Mr. Cheeks's Sweet Potato Pie. The group's members (Mr. Cheeks, Freaky Tah, Pretty Lou, and DJ Spigg-Nice) are sipping on cosmic smokes and discussing it up for their second effort. Rushed from school to get the boys' out as quickly as Ben & Jerry's on Harlem's 128th Street. The Jamaica, Queens-based Lost Boys are at this neighborhood corner shop in conjunction with a program on the store run with Mark Morris, a shelter for homeless men. "This is to show the kids, and the community, we got love for them," says Mr. Cheeks.

While the ice cream parlor's stereo continuously blasts the various remixes of the Lost Boys' first single, "Lifestyles of the Rich and Shameless," the kids keep screaming the infectious chorus, "It's all in the same game." They overemphasize Freaky Tah's part, whose rah-rah voice can be heard in the track's background, and it's starting to annoy some of the regular patrons.

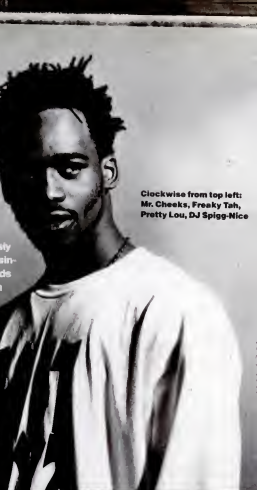
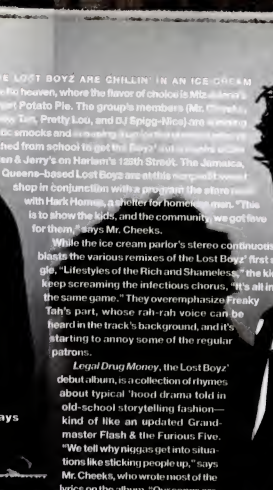
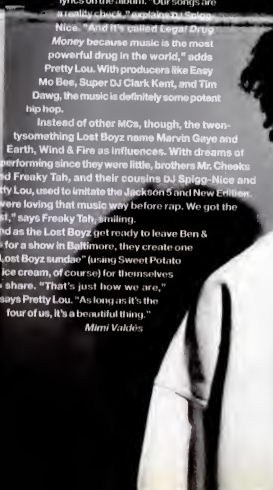
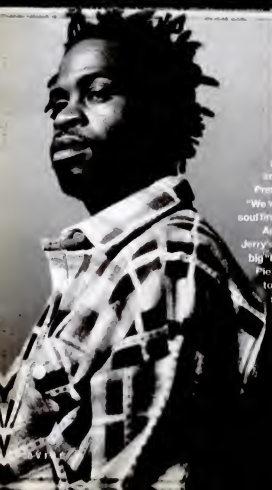
Legal Drug Money, the Lost Boys' debut album, is a collection of rhymes about typical 'hood drama told in old-school storytelling fashion—kind of like an updated Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five. "We tell why niggas get into situations like sticking people up," says Mr. Cheeks, who wrote most of the lyrics on the album. "Our songs are a reality check," explains DJ Spigg-Nice. "And it's called *Legal Drug Money* because music is the most powerful drug in the world," adds Pretty Lou. With producers like Easy Mo Bee, Super DJ Clark Kent, and Tim Dawg, the music is definitely some potent hip hop.

Instead of other MCs, though, the twentysomething Lost Boys name Marvin Gaye and Earth, Wind & Fire as influences. With dreams of performing since they were little, brothers Mr. Cheeks and Freaky Tah, and their cousins DJ Spigg-Nice and Pretty Lou, used to imitate the Jackson 5 and New Edition. "We were loving that music way before rap. We got the soul first," says Freaky Tah, smiling.

And as the Lost Boys get ready to leave Ben & Jerry's for a show in Baltimore, they create one big "Lost Boys sundae" (using Sweet Potato Pie ice cream, of course) for themselves to share. "That's just how we are," says Pretty Lou. "As long as it's the four of us, it's a beautiful thing."

Mimi Vukob

Clockwise from top left:
Mr. Cheeks, Freaky Tah,
Pretty Lou, DJ Spigg-Nice





What if there were no sports?

Where would I be?

Who would I be?

Would I still be your hero?

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ut a journey deep inside the mind of writer/producer DeVante Swing reveals that the notorious mad band is a little bit country and a little bit rock 'n' soul. Photographs by Geoffrey de Boismenu

Just

"I don't think of Jodeci as no boy group or no harmonizing

It's 2 a.m. in New York City. God knows where K-Ci, Dalvin, and JoJo are. We're in a recording studio, where over Zima and too-hot microwaved Chicken McNuggets, Donald "DeGrate Swing" DeGrate says he is one persistent motherfucker. He likes that word, and he loves to tell a story.

When I was 16, I ran away from home and went to Minneapolis to get a job with Prince. K-Ci and JoJo and them was, like, "If you make it with Prince, don't forget about us." When I got to Minneapolis, I hooked up with two white girls who had this gold Mustang that their father let me drive. I was up at Paisley Park every day begging for a job, asking people to listen to my tape. The receptionist kept saying she couldn't help me. I wasn't gonna leave until they put me on.

But then I started realizing that Prince was the only one making real money in his camp. So I took my ass right back to Charlotte, N.C. I wrote a song about a girl I liked; the chorus was, "Where could I go wrong..." JoJo sang the song. People were saying we should do something with it.

I played K-Ci the tape over the phone and told him me and JoJo was thinking about going to New York. We was all hype 'cause we was thinking we'd created a sound, something new. So just me and JoJo was gonna go, and K-Ci said, "You can't use my name, then!" JoJo was, like, "No K-Ci! He'll change our sound!" But when my brother, Dalvin, started coming around, JoJo said, "Let Dalvin be down!" And I was, like, "Hell, no! He won't be coming up in here trying to take over." Finally, K-Ci said, "I'm just going for the ride. Don't expect shit." But when all four of us was on our way to New York, everybody was, like, "What we gon' do now, De?" All I could think was, I gotta make something happen; everybody's looking at me.

It took them five hours to get from their Queens hotel to Uptown Entertainment's offices in Midtown Manhattan. The four boys from North Carolina had a little trouble finding their way. "We got to New York with 29 songs on three tapes," says DeVante. "And at first, they was not trying to hear us." Legend has it that A&R guy Kurt Woodley thought Jodeci's demo didn't have enough "bump." Heavy D overheard the tape and convinced Uptown's president and CEO, Andre Harrell, to hear them sing live.

Sean "Puffy" Combs, now president and CEO of

Bad Boy Entertainment, was an Uptown intern when he heard Jodeci for the first time: "I was bugging that they were my age and able to sing like that. K-Ci was smaller than he is now. I couldn't believe all that came out of him." It did, though. And just like in the movies, Jodeci signed a recording contract, moved into the projects in the Bronx, and recorded *Forever My Lady*. It was 1991, and as boy groups began to spring up like weeds, the tallest and the strongest were Boyz II Men and Jodeci. Still are.

"Silk? Shai? UNV?" DeVante chuckles. "Put that in there. That I laughed. They're just jokes. There are only two powers: us and Boyz II Men. Anybody that comes after us has to be classified as like one or the other." Boyz

The differences, though, run even deeper than that. All four members of Jodeci have been gospel professionals since they were young boys. As members of gospel bands, they traveled the southern revival circuit and cut albums—DeVante and Dalvin with their father, the Rev. Donald DeGrate Sr.; K-Ci and JoJo with their father, Clifford Hailey, known as the Haileys. Folks down South used to call Cedric "K-Ci" Hailey the "Michael Jackson of gospel." Jodeci are used to—as Mahalia Jackson once said—"singing in churches where nobody would dare stop them until the Lord arrived." Instigators of spiritual ecstasies as boys, they are catalysts of another kind as men.

These two sets of brothers were raised in Pentecostal churches—African-American Christian temples named in commemoration of the descent of the Holy Ghost. But unlike Sam Cooke, Al Green, or the many other artists who've made the transformation from gospel to soul or pop music, Jodeci's other influence—hip hop—is something that didn't exist at all 25 years ago. Green (who went through a life-altering moment with a pot of cereal) is the legend to whom Andre Harrell compares K-Ci Hailey. "K-Ci's a real gospel singer," says Harrell with a bit of a laugh. "The first one dressed, first one to perform. The kind who might get some hot grits thrown on him by Mary [J. Blige, K-Ci's girlfriend] and end up singing gospel again."

Harrell knew the guys needed a little grooming, so he looked to a tastemaker. "Their style was country, not nationwide hot or East Coast refined," says Puffy, who'd been promoted to artist development by the time Jodeci were ready to drop *Forever My Lady* in 1991. He says he took a gamble and made them "look hip hop" because "all the tapes they had in their pockets were rap tapes."

Though DeVante's self-given last name implies otherwise, Jodeci's sound contains only whispers of what people were calling new jack swing in the late '80s. Individually, you can see where they're coming from: K-Ci is some compromise of Bobby Womack and Solomon Burke; DeVante is on some Marvin Gaye'sesque, funk-flavored rhythmic mission; JoJo's voice rings like a pewter bell; Dalvin, in a jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none way, jumps in where he's needed vocally, providing grinding stage presence, and produces the more upbeat Jodeci cuts. That's separately. When they pull it all together, it's way wild. It's like adding lemons (K-Ci)

THE BROTHERS HAILEY
K-Ci and JoJo



II Men have been cast as the pop Boy Wonders, and Jodeci as the magnetic, penis-pumping, bluesy Bad Boys. To Puffy, though, it's all about Jodeci: "No group can compare to them. Not even Boyz II Men. Boyz II Men have been of a mass appeal, but Jodeci is straight black. Straight chicken and grits. Boyz II Men is a salad and a veggie platter. But it's all good food."

"There's no comparison," says Dalvin on the subject of B.I.M. after a rehearsal at Harlem's Apollo Theatre (the group is preparing for a live BET taping, to be followed by a 10-city club tour in July to benefit Harrell's new Urban Aid Life Beat AIDS awareness project). "We're like light and dark." Or, perhaps, like sex and driviness. "Don't nobody make like Jodeci. We're making music that we like. We don't make music to be on every white awards show. Nothing against Boyz II Men—I like them. But I prefer soul music."



• After a triple-platinum debut and a "lost" second album, Jodeci are back with *The Show*, *The After Party*, *The Hotel*. Dalvin, Jolo, and K-Ci level with Danyel Smith about songs, sex, and brushes with

Love

Just doin' it

South-Central's Montell Jordan is painting a positive picture of ghetto life, and his urban feel-good music is topping the charts. *Scott Poulson-Bryant* discovers just how he's doin' it

It's spring in Los Angeles, and the 1995 *Soul Train* Music Awards are in full effect. Superstars mark the spot, air-kissing and crotch-grabbing, turning their familiar faces to the roaming photographers. But the not-so-familiar face of six-foot-eight-inch Montell Jordan towers above the scene and the competition. As the goateed new jack climbs into a stretch limo with mogul Russell Simmons and model Veronica Webb, on his way to a dinner at ritzy Mortons with music industry godfather Clarence Avant, Uptown Entertainment president Andre Harrell, and actress Salli Richardson, he looks mad comfortable, at home even. He's not in the least overwhelmed by the choice company he's keeping tonight.

Fast-forward another few weeks, and Jordan's debut single, "This Is How We Do It," a funky, up-tempo ode to the party vibe in his native South-Central served up over a classic Slick Rick beat, is the No. 1 song in the country. Only now Montell doesn't seem as comfortable. He's steady fielding questions about his height, his music, and what it feels like to be at the top of the pops. In the last nine days, he's been to Houston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Detroit, and D.C., performed Bobby Caldwell's "What You Won't Do for Love" on *New York Undercover*, shot a video for the slinky follow-up single "Somethin' 4 da Honeyz," and been interviewed by CNN. The other side of the superstar coin is in effect: gettin' your show together and takin' it on the promotional-tour road.

But Montell, who won't reveal his age, is sanguine about all the drama. He's learned that this—like the chichi *Soul Train* night—is just part of the game. "I didn't understand all that comes with having a good song," he says, "the smiling, the autographs, all the responsibility. It's been nonstop. I haven't had time to reflect on what's going on." For now, he's just concentrating on staying healthy, particularly in the vocal department. He says, laughing, "I ask myself, Will my voice be cool after doing four shows in a row?"

But deep down, Montell knows his voice will hold up just as his spirit did during the seven years it took to land a record deal. "I been around for a minute," he says with a sly grin. A veteran of local talent shows and church choir crooning, Montell Jordan honed his skills and fleshed his approach on the L.A. circuit before hooking up with hip hop player Paul Stewart, the president of PMP Records who hipped Def Jam to Warren G and Domino. On his first trip to New York City, with Stewart, Montell performed a live

audition, singing "Get My Roll On" for Russell Simmons in the gym inside his Manhattan loft. "The song was so hip hop, it blew my mind," recalls Simmons. "Montell wasn't just a singer singing to a hip hop track but an actual rap singer." Jordan was immediately signed to PMP/RAL. At last he could stop scratching that seven-year itch.

In the studio, Montell started building his songs around samples from blues tracks by B.B. King because no one else had done that. And on the lyrical tip, he looked homeward—much like his bluesman forebears. He didn't exactly care for the bleak, hopeless picture being painted of South-Central Los Angeles—his 'hood—so he flipped the script. "I wanted to focus on the positive of what was going on. I wanted to make records about seeing my moms or my grandmother, having barbecues...being nostalgic," Montell says. "It's not all peaches and cream, but it's not all drive-bys either."

A Pepperdine University graduate (who didn't play hoops, but ran scrimmages with the school's basketball players and roomed with future New York Knick Doug Christie) and the oldest of four children, Montell saw love and hope in his community and stresses that in his jams. He says he owes his positive outlook to his parents, who "never fought and kept me out of trouble. Besides, man," he adds, "no trouble in the street would be worse than the trouble I'd catch at home for getting in trouble in the street. I learned that kind of respect early." So much respect that Montell's mother's voice is the first voice you hear shouting down from a helicopter in the "My Mommy" intro to his album. Says Montell, "My mom loves to be involved in the things I do. She introduced me to the world through birth, so she may as well introduce me to the music world."

As his promotional tour winds down, Montell looks forward to relaxation time at home. But, ever the artist, he wants to get back into the studio, lay down some tracks, or—*he says*—create more from his craft. "I'm like that *juvy* in *New Jack City* when it comes to my music: 'It be callin' me like a drug,'" he says. "When all the lights go down, I *just* create. I wanna inspire emotion. The best music, the music I like, doesn't promote doing something; it inspires me to feel something. And that's what I want to do with my music: take you through a series of emotions." □

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fanzines and want autographs. K-Ci looks at them from behind his black shades. The girls are whispering about the tattoo on his neck. They think it says MARY, for Mary J. Blige. But it actually says MAZE, after his grandmother.

Later on, after a Grand Marnier on the rocks, in a rare moment of conversation with someone other than crew, Jo says of his brother's chocolate fudge expertise: "You know how K-Ci is. He takes his job seriously—'No matter what it is.' They all seem to take it seriously. As their album title suggests, they're in it for the money—for the shows, the after-parties, and the groupie-filled hotel lobbies. But also for the love of music. To see K-Ci Hailey in rehearsal, singing '(Not Just) Kneec Deep' slowed down and steady like it was 'Amazing Grace,' is an awesome experience."

"This is a job," says K-Ci, in the Apollo Theatre's rehearsal hall, mike in one hand, Newport burned almost down to the fingertips of his other. "But we're doing what we love. What we were born to do."

DeVante's taken off his dark glasses and his stocking cap. The longer hair on top of his head is wrapped in many tiny rubber bands. The new Jodeci logo, the one with the sword and tiny nude woman, has recently been tattooed on his forearm. The skin there is raised and a little crusty. His upper body is elaborate with tattoos. Tired and high, DeVante's playing with his lighters. The gold one works, and a tiny orange-blue flame illuminates his face. The silvery one hisses and hisses. No spark. He keeps trying, though, flipping the tiny lever over and over again with his thumb.

"Sex is dope, but it's Money Over Bitches—I'm down with the MOB," he laughs. "I write about love. In Jodeci songs there's not that much sex. My writing shows I'm a lonely person. I don't know why."

"If you look at 'Stay,' I'm asking a girl to stay. 'Forever My Lady'—so you're having my baby, I'll be there for you. 'Come & Talk to Me'—I'm asking a girl to come and talk to me; there again, I'm by myself. 'I'm Still Waiting'—I'm waiting, I'm by myself again. 'U & I' could be one, after all, but I'm trying to explain to the girl we can do this, we can do that. I'm not with her. Go on to 'Fenin'—I'm flending for the girl. I'm still not with her. 'Cry for You'—I'm crying for this bitch, I'm still not with the bitch. 'Alone'—I'm asking her to be alone. 'What About Us'—I'm still not with her. On the new album, I said I'm a gay sexual, write one o' them freaky, knocking-the-boots shits. But it's all, 'What must I say? / What must I do?' Jodeci songs is always begging."

Now it's 24 hours later, almost to the minute. Like 2:30 a.m. We're back in the same studio. The Rev. Al Green's voice leaps from the giant speakers like a sinewy brown ballerina, lithe and majestic as ever. Green is singing a new song, "Could This Be the Love," written and produced by DeVante Swing.

Al Green. DeVante is working with one of the chief sculptors of gospel as soul, a man who has spent his life testing the thin emotional fabric that distinguishes the embrace of a loving God from the embrace of loving human. DeVante feels right at home. He sits, head back, eyes closed behind dark shades, deciding which of the 11 takes sound best. Homeboy's been doing this for a long time.

no one would take her home, so she got mad and made up a story.

In April, DeVante pleaded guilty to gun charges, as did K-Ci to sexual contact [both were facing sentencing as VIBE went to press]. "K-Ci may have touched her breast," says DeVante, "but it was no rape, no sexual thing. He pleaded guilty, but whatever he pleaded to, it didn't involve sex at all."

But then DeVante gets angry. "Why we gotta be crazy, though?" he asks, all bitter and serious—he expects a clear answer. Like someone can tell him what "good" really means, what "bad" really means, what sin is and what it isn't. "Crazy like what? What is this 'bad boys' shit, this negative shit? Fuck that. I ain't ill. I ain't bad. I ain't trying to hurt nobody."

DeVante knows about betrayal and violation. In the spring of 1993, robbers broke in to his house and stole \$160,000 worth of jewelry and clothes. "They had a gun in my mouth and one to the back of my head," he says easily. "Talking about 'Kill 'em.' I sleep lighter now. Shit made me want to fuck up a nigga. I'm in trouble for guns, but you won't catch me not packing." DeVante seems to make no connection between his own pain and any pain he may or may not have inflicted on others. "I'm a regular motherfucker," is his spat-out description of self. "I shop at the malls in New Jersey, I rent videos, I hang with my niggas, play cards—and might come up with a dope song like that."

"You wondering if I ever did fun shit like take a girl to the Bahamas? Walk on the beach? No. I don't live like that. I want to do shit like that, but that ain't me. I gotta watch my back and shit." He pauses. "Held hands?" Pauses again. "I've done that." Then DeVante momentarily slips back into the unemotional pimp role currently in vogue. He's faded in and out of it all evening. "I get my ass, now—don't get me wrong."

Then he's earnest again. "If I was that much in love, would I be really fucking around on 'em? Would I?" His face is toward the ceiling. "If you're in love, you're happy. If you're out there fucking the world, is that really your main girl? When you in love, you don't think about no one else. All you think about is this one motherfucker. Now he leans forward. Light brown eyes unblinking, in... on being understood. "So if somebody came by all fly, big ass, tight dress—see her pussy print—beautiful eyes and all that shit, you wouldn't even see that bitch. All you'd be thinking about is your girl at home." Deep breath. "So then I ask myself, I have I really loved?"

Mad melodrama. DeVante Swing's bony shoulders go up in a big shrug. □



WHAT ABOUT US?
"We're doing what we were born to do."

He says stuff comes to him quickly. "Like with K-Ci and Mary's duet, 'I Don't Want to Do Anything'—Mary walked into the studio, asked, 'Where's the words to the track?' and I said, 'Give me a minute.' I wrote her and K-Ci's verses in like five minutes. I guess feelings are inside me and they just come out. I sit and zone. Not about a real relationship—just zoning."

Zoning. Maybe that's what DeVante and K-Ci were doing back in April 1993, when a woman claimed that, after she left a Manhattan club with K-Ci and went back to DeVante's New Jersey home, DeVante pointed a gun at her. She also said that K-Ci threatened her and fondled her breast. At the time, DeVante said the girl was upset because he had a gun in the house and because

group," says DeVante. "I think of us as a black rock band."

and water (Dalvin) and ice (DeVante) and sugar (JoJo) and getting vodka-Jodeci.

And folks drink it up. Like Luther Vandross in the early 1980s, Jodeci have an extremely loyal black fan base. They tend to live at the top of *Billboard's* R&B charts. Only a song not written by DeVante—the group's cover of Stevie Wonder's "Lately"—ever made the Top 10 on *Billboard's* Hot 100 Singles chart.

But *Forever My Lady*, which had one gold single ("Come & Talk to Me") and sold 3 million copies, soared to No. 1 on the R&B Albums chart. The follow-up, *Diary of a Mad Band*, sold 1 million copies with next to no promotion. "Uptown didn't push it," says Dalvin. "Maybe they got mad because we started fucking with Suge." It's the ubiquitous Marion "Suge" Knight, CEO of Death Row Records, to whom Dalvin refers.

Right before the release of *Diary*, there were rumors that Jodeci wanted out of their management contract with Uptown. Jodeci were signed to the Uptown/MCA label, but DeVante supposedly wanted the group to leave Uptown and go to Death Row Management. [There were rumors that Knight threatened Harrell. Both deny the story.] K-Ci says the band chose not to participate in any video after "Peenin'" because Uptown "wasn't treating us like we'd just sold 3 million albums. We're making three times as much now as we was then."

DeVante (who is now personally managed by Sheryl Knigsberg, who's also providing the whole group with "informal interim management") has his own take on the subject. "Suge got a lot of energy," he says, drinking red wine from a mug at the studio. "The record company felt like he was on a power trip that would damage the relationship between us and Uptown. But the negative vibe they expected never came across. Suge'll do whatever is needed in a given situation. We down with Suge; we signed to Uptown."

Jodeci were almost a trio. It's something that people forget because Dalvin's been in since the ride to New York. "Jodeci'll never break up in this lifetime," says DeVante. "All of us got our own shit, but it'll always be us."

In North Charlotte, we lived in Hidden Valley, like the salad dressing. The place was all the fly tricks. I always stayed with friends. Always doing something. You know how they say preacher's kids are always the worst.

Me and Dalvin, K-Ci and JoJo, we used to hear each other's [gospel] songs on the radio. These tricks we was

messin' with told us we needed to meet each other. So when they brought us together, K-Ci saw Dalvin with his girl, so he pulled a gun on Dalvin. K-Ci's really an I-don't-give-a-fuck type of person. JoJo calmed K-Ci down; I calmed Dalvin down. We was all like 15 and 16.

Then me and K-Ci and JoJo started hanging out, messin' around with songs. They had this little studio in this shopping center. I pretty much moved in there with K-Ci and JoJo. I lived there five nights a week for like a year, fucked a lot of girls, partied—we had a little money from our gospel gigs. I'd go home Friday nights, go to church on Sunday, and after church, go back to the studio. My par-

can't make people feel you when you're just singing a line, you ain't got it!" His rangy frame buckles back into the chair. "We just all doing our thing. I don't think of Jodeci as no boy group or no harmonizing group," he says. "I think of us as a black rock 'n' roll band."

"We're not the cutest niggas in the world," he continues, playing down his and Dalvin's lusty good looks, as well as K-Ci's and JoJo's sensual, if less obvious, appeal. "But we're special. A song could be mediocre, but by what we do to it, we add what it needs. No polish, no routines. We ain't tryin' to be hard; we just don't give a fuck. I can flip tracks and make a Babyface-type song,

but we're not trying to make pop songs. It's not about harmony, it's about us doing our thing. And our thing is, 'Can you feel us? Can you feel us?'

The answer is yes. "Freak'n You," the first single from the new album, is vintage Jodeci: K-Ci in prime, achy-churchy form; JoJo melting in and out; DeVante's erotic words spoken over his own pulsing rhythms. But the rest of *The Show, The After Party, The Hotel* sounds completely new. The Dalvin-produced "Get on Up" (cowritten by JoJo, K-Ci, and Dalvin) is the first upbeat single Jodeci have ever created without listening to. "I didn't like it at first," DeVante says. "It was too happy for me. Now I love it, 'cause you can't help but be glad to it."

"Love U a Life" could easily have been on Boyz II Men's recent album. A vague power ballad, the song is one of the original 29 from Jodeci's demo. But instead of reaching for pop heights, the chorus has some freaked-out harmonies flowing over a stomping bass line. And the closing acoustic number, "Good Lovin'" (which signifies "Face" "When Can I See You"), is dazzling. The first verse showcases K-Ci's tobacco-raspy baritone voice—alone except for DeVante's guitar. JoJo's buttery

tenor is the solo star of the second verse, and it too seems to glow, standing out there alone.

It's 4:00 on a cool spring Harlem afternoon as Cedric "K-Ci" Hailey gets out of his jeep on his way to work. He's got a gold, diamond-packed JODECI emblem dangling from his neck and gold hoops in both ears. Offstage, on the street, K-Ci is surprisingly little. Skinny.

Today K-Ci is a "celebrity scooper" at the nonprof-it Ben & Jerry's ice cream parlor on 125th Street. "May I help you?" K-Ci asks the awed congregation. He's got on a plastic apron and is up to his elbows in New York Super Fudge Chunk. Most of the Catholic schoolgirls—with their gray skirts, nose rings, Tims, and bright red beepers—have color pictures of Jodeci torn from

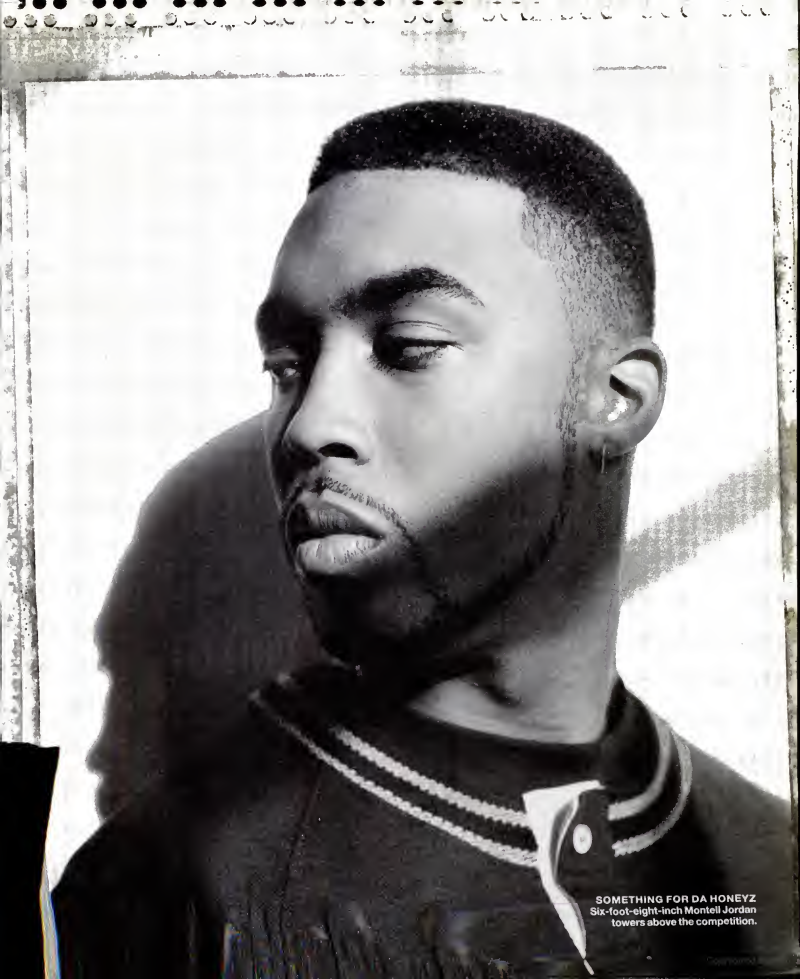


EACH OTHER'S KEEPER
Mr. Dalvin and DeVante Swing

ents knew where I was.

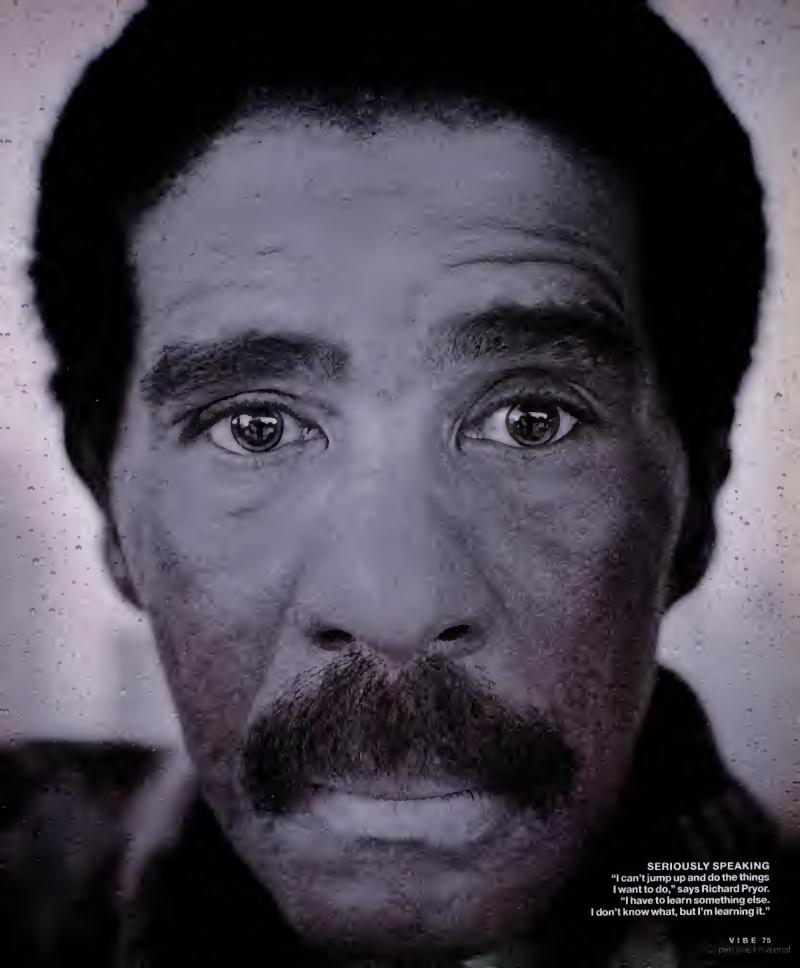
One night, at like 3, 4 in the morning, me, JoJo, and K-Ci was sittin' in this old station wagon we used to call *Cletus*. Dalvin would be around, but not really down—he and K-Ci was still beefin'. "Think if we did R&B music... what would it be like?" We started imaginin' it and coming up with names—I never wanted anything like the *Thies* or the *Thats*; I wanted to put myself in the name. So we was, like, 'Why don't we do Jo for JoJo, De for DeVante, and Ci for K-Ci?'

DeVante, still nursing his vino, has just declared K-Ci and JoJo the best singers in the world. "So you're havin' my baby—do you know what that was, when K-Ci sang that?" he asks, gesticulating wildly. "If you



SOMETHING FOR DA HONEYZ
Six-foot-eight-inch Montell Jordan
towers above the competition.

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SERIOUSLY SPEAKING

"I can't jump up and do the things
I want to do," says Richard Pryor.
"I have to learn something else.
I don't know what, but I'm learning it."

T rue confession time: When my editors first offered me the Richard Pryor assignment, I didn't exactly leap out of my seat to claim it. Neither my sense of the tragic nor the comic is so bloodless as to relish reporting how the once hyperactive Pryor copes with the ravages of multiple sclerosis. (MS is a degenerative disease that affects the central nervous system, causing uncontrollable muscle tremors and paralysis in some patients.)

Richard Pryor is, of course, the most profound and influential comedian of the late 20th century. Combine the pathos of Charlie Chaplin with the raunch of Redd Foxx, the critical insight of Dick Gregory and Lenny Bruce, and the wide-eyed wonder of Bill Cosby, and you might create a stand-up mutant, not a Rich and Pryor. As hilarious as these funnyman are, Pryor made comedy more than raw; he made it ass-out, naked, and confessional. He brought the blues to American comedy—that laughing-to-keep-from-crying aspect of black life that often pushes us beyond decorum to deconstruction, or more plainly, tellin' it like it multikins is.

Like all great minds, Pryor's helps us appreciate how noble and absurd a creature man is. You literally have to go to Shakespeare, James Joyce, or James Baldwin to find readings of human folly as incisive as Pryor's. Yet Pryor has it one up on those masters of the word: He didn't need exclamation points—his body movement was his punctuation.

Pryor has left us some wonderful films of his stand-up talents (1973's *Richard Pryor—Live in Concert* is the funniest of the four) and of his dramatic acting abilities, most notably in *Lady Sings the Blues*, *The Mack*, and *Blac Collar*. But to his fans, there always seemed to be two Richard Pryors: the hero of his stand-up romps, and the chump of his Hollywood comedies. Sometimes the twain did meet, like in Michael Schultz's *Which Way Is Up?* or his four movies with Gene Wilder, but not often enough.

As Pryor's art, celebrity, and wealth increased in the '70s and '80s, so did his personal chaos: divorces, drug habits, diseases, and self-hood. When he burned himself up in a drug-induced haze in 1980, the episode seemed more like a sikit than a coke fiend's cul-de-sac. These incidents and more are now chronicled in his autobiography, *Pryor Convictions and Other Life Sentences* (Pantheon), written with Todd Gold. Alongside them are ribald tales about Miles Davis, Pam Grier, and Billy Dee Williams; tough remembrances of growing up poor in his grandmother's whorehouse in Peoria, Ill.; and reflections about his struggle to find his own comedic style. Further documenting Pryor's work are the six Loose Cannon Records reissues of Pryor's LAFF Records comedy albums; the full catalog of 12 will soon be available.

Up until I walked into his Encino mansion and looked into his eyes, I didn't know how things were going to go. For once, I didn't prepare questions. I figured I'd sit down, roll the tapes, and let the love flow. With me was Peter Harris, a fellow Howard University alum, a Pryor fanatic, poet, journalist, and family man who rolled up on me in Los Angeles the day before the interview. What neither of us counted on was the presence of Jennifer Lee, Pryor's ex-wife, now his best friend/manager/cheerleader, who complicated and enriched the session. In Pryor's bio, Lee comes off as confused, maternal, and much abused. In person, she is centered and mature woman whose bond with Pryor seems more motherly than wifely at this point, but no less passionate and protective. (And he needs that. Lee estimates that Pryor's been bilked out of some \$50 million

BY LAWYERS AND HANGERS-ON.) Before I began the interview proper, I caught this exchange between Lee and Pryor: "Would you prefer that I leave?" Jennifer asked. "Would that make it better?" "No," Pryor replied. "It would probably make it worse."

GREG TATE: *When you started working on the book, did you know you were going to be as open and honest as you were with your courtier?*

RICHARD PRYOR: No.

GT: *Did you think you'd be more evasive?*

RP: Yes, lots of times. It was a hard thing to do this book. "Cause it's the truth. And the truth was something I avoided at all costs.

JENNIFER LEE: Not really. I mean, look at your work....

RP: Oh, fuck that. That's work. That's for money, you know what I mean?

GT: *You've said that when you went to Africa, you didn't see any niggers, and so that word got excited from your vocabulary. How come bitch didn't follow?*

RP: I thought a lot about that at the time. Because if I see one, I have to see the other. You're more right than wrong. My grandmother used to say that to the pimps and stuff who used the word *bitch*: "Excuse me, son, did your mother teach you how to say that?"

GT: *What did your grandmother think about the women that worked for her?*

RP: Good. She was an okay boss. I didn't see it for what it was. I was a kid. I saw the house different than what it was.

JL: But how was Mama, Richard? Because I remember when she beat me over the leg with a stick like she was talking in the whorehouse.

RP: Listen, we're back about Mama now. She's gone. Leave her alone. Ain't nothing we can do.

JL: But how did she treat those women?

RP: I imagine she treated 'em like shit.

GT: *Did you think the way you felt about women was affected by how she treated them, or by what you saw growing up in a whorehouse?*

RP: I think what I saw affected me. But see, they were beautiful to me, in my mind's eye. They were like fucking fabulous. I didn't see them for what they were or nothing. I said, God, this is fucking great. But I was a kid. I really was a kid once. I really was. It's been a mystery to me how that affected me all my life, and I'm 54. I don't care.

JL: He picked women who wanted to try and fix him. I sure as heck tried to fix him.

RP: Did you?

JL: Yeah, I did. It was terror, living in that scene.

RP: Wasn't an ax murder?

JL: A train wreck, maybe.

GT: *An earlier version of the book has one passage that struck me as being a revelation for you. You write about women behaving like lunatics when you got ready to leave. It's like you drove them mad. You talk about how in relationships, violence can work like a hex, like a spell.*

JL: Brilliant point.

RP: I'm glad you like it.

GT: *When did you realize that?*

RP: Probably when I wrote it. You know, it's amazing. I'm embarrassed to say this, but I used to be a violent man, except I'd only thought with. I'd never have a fight with a man. Now listen to me: this movie company that they gave me, Indigo [Columbia Pictures gave Pryor his own

production company as part of a \$40 million deal]. I hired Jim Brown to run it and realized I made a mistake. And I said to myself, I'll don't knock this motherfucker out, or at least make the attempt, then I ain't never gonna hit nobody, ever again. And that's the truth. I said, You know, I'm so bad. I bulldoze people all over, but I ain't bulldozed this motherfucker, so there ain't shit to my stuff.

GT: *What was that moment like when you did finally tell Jim Brown that he was fired?*

RP: He fucked around and turned down Prince's *Purple Rain*. That movie would have been great for us, but Jim thought it didn't have enough black people among the production assistants or whatever. I said, "So?" "No, see, you got to have black people. This is a black thing." I said, "What we gonna do, Jim?" I felt like I was mad. I was insane. I told Jim Brown over lunch that I did I want this company, and Jim cried. Jim Brown, you dig? I was either going to die night there or live with a broken face. I didn't care because I was tired of his shit.

JL: You lost the art. You guys lost the big picture. Plus it was two big male egos in there too, right? Don't you think so?

RP: I don't think so. It's just that I have the Ego, and if you come with your shit, ain't nothing for me to do but hit you in the head with a hammer.

GT: *You set the stage for Spike Lee and John Singleton and the Hughes brothers. Before Indigo, you were even thinking a black man could be in control of his career in Hollywood? There were other milestones in your career too, like getting paid \$4 million for Superman III.*

RP: But the movie, man. It wasn't my fault. They did give me the \$4 million, so I did what the director said. But I didn't get to do shit in it.

GT: *You've talked about what a lot of us were thinking back in the day—that you were never as in command of your talent in a Hollywood film as you were doing stand-up. You had so much room onstage. It was your world.*

RP: It was. For a minute.

JL: You still rule, Richard.

RP: Shut up.

JL: I just want to see you work again.

GT: *You did do a tour a while back. You say it made you realize that you've got more courage than stamina because of the MS.*

JL: He's had too many martinis too. You want me to leave yet?

RP: No.

GT: *Did you feel drugs gave you more energy to work night after night, or was cocaine just part of your lifestyle?*

RP: Hey, listen, doing cocaine was for me like being a smart kid. I knew it was wrong. But shit, cocaine made me feel like I had something so many people liked. And since I had it, I could say, "Hey, want some?" and not even look at the roll [of bills]. I could say, "Here, have some more." I didn't understand how insane that was then. My friend Burt was the first person I saw smoke it, and he said, "I saw God. God is here talking to me." He sat in that chair, and I looked back at Burt, and I said, "I'm gonna try some of this shit, because he's fucking gone."

GT: *When did you realize you were addicted?*

RP: I was talking to Redd Foxx. I said, "Why'd I want it, Redd? I get so much and still I want more. Why?" He said, "Cause you a junkie." That went past me like, *cool!* I'd never been back a junkie before, but it was true. And I always thought, Cocaine doesn't hook nobody. I was under the impression that the Lady don't be bad to you, 'cause she's a Lady.

JL: He's still addicted to cigarettes.

RP: She doesn't like my additives.

JL: I hate the cigarettes because I think you could real-



CURTAIN CALL: Richard Pryor, pictured here at his Encino home, heals himself with the clarity and precision he once used to dissect hypocrisy and humor.

ly help your disease if you stopped smoking. That's all. RP: That's what you say.

GT: *What is MS like for you on a day-to-day basis?*
RP: It's not pleasant, but I look at it like this: I've seen people a lot worse than me. I've seen people fucked up, man, and it scared me. I saw 150 people with MS when I'd never seen anybody else with it.

JL: Richard's actually walking again with a walker.
RP: The other night when I was in the walker, I couldn't wait until I could get to the table and sit down. Because that's a frightening thing when you're walking and you feel your legs going, "Hey, wanna give me a break?" And there was another 50 feet and everybody wanted to show me the food. They said, "Hey, Rich, food's over here." And I didn't want to see no food and shit.

JL: Maybe MS is a way of keeping you alive.
RP: Maybe, 'cause I'm alive. But where's the money? And the pussy?

GT: *You talk about being addicted to laughter too. How do you deal with not being able to access your talent?*

RP: It makes me very angry. I say very angry and maybe that's pushing it, but I'm angry because I can't do shit. I can't jump up and do the things I want to do. I have to learn something else. I don't know what, but I'm learning it.

GT: *Do you still think of yourself as being an artist, an entertainer? Is that still in your definition of Richard Pryor now? Or is that part gone?*

RP: No, it's not gone, but it's fa-a-a-away. Like it's through this veil and I can't see it. I know where it is but I can't reach it.

PETER HARRIS: *For the cats who were coming up when*

"MAYBE MS IS A WAY OF KEEPING YOU ALIVE, RICHARD." "MAYBE, 'CAUSE I'M ALIVE. BUT WHERE'S THE MONEY? AND THE WOMEN?"

you were doing the work, it wasn't just comedy to us. It was like hearing your grandfather talk, or your big brother. Do you have a sense of the type of impact you had on people when you were at your peak? Or even now?

RP: I like hearing what you're saying. If you were around here before, and I had listened, I would have felt different about myself.

GT: *How much of an inspiration were people like Miles Davis to you?*

RP: Miles... I met Miles at a bar on 86th Street in New York. A guy said, "Miles, I'd like you to meet a nice young man." Miles said, "What the fuck you know?"

GT: *Did he ever talk to you about your work?*

RP: Yeah. He said, "You a funny motherfucker." I told him once, I said, "Miles, I got a script about Charlie Parker." Miles said, "Charlie Parker was greedy," I said, "What you mean, Miles?" Miles said, "He was really gonna rape everything. He fucked everything, and he played everything." It was too much. With Miles, all I ended up doing was saying, "Please stop. Miles. Stop." Because he just was talking. But I picked up on it, because I said this is real shit here. Bless his heart. But there is another side to being honest, you got to remember, because it's a very dangerous blade. It swipes and cuts off thousands of heads.

GT: *What's your relationship with your children? Do you have more time for them now?*

RP: Hmm, hm, hm, hm. It's like that. I didn't know that it was going to be forever, but they are. That's something I'm understanding now. To have kids, you got to have 'em forever. I admire their mothers. I really do. Their mothers call me up for things, and I know what they're going through because I had them for a little bit.

JL: Well, in some cases, having kids was a career choice, right?

RP: No, it was never a career choice for people. You didn't do it.

RP: No, thank God, I didn't do it.

RP: No, but you got two vicious dogs.

GT: *Has there ever been a time when you didn't help someone, and you should have?*

RP: Please don't make me think of those things. Was there ever a time I could've helped and didn't? Well, I didn't go to Nam, that's the only thing I could think of I wish I was in Vietnam. I don't know why. I really don't, but I just feel like I belonged there at the time. I should have been there.

JL: No, you shouldn't have. You were doing more important things. Why should you be over there killing people and killing yourself?

GT: *So do you think that maybe you're experiencing guilt for the young men that came up in your hometown and died in Vietnam?*

RP: [Softly] Umm-hmm.

GT: *As hard as you worked, did you ever feel like, "Why me? Why was I the one to become successful?"*

RP: Oh God, yes. I beat myself up a lot about that. And then I met Ethel [his term for women].

GT: *What kind of therapy do you have to do?*

RP: The therapists massage my legs, and I walk on the walker. I hate that fucking walker, I hate it. She says that I'm going great. And I say to her, "But I'm on this fucking walker!"

JL: If you're physically diminished, that doesn't diminish you as a person...

RP: Okay, then sit on my face...

JL: Oh, stop it, Richard. Oh God.

RP: See, I can't make you do that, so that's diminishment.

GT: *Does poverty scare you more than death?*

RP: No. I know about poverty. I know it very well. Very well. I just think poor people—they're not nice. I mean, they don't mean to hurt you, but they're not nice. And I don't want to be around them if I can help it. Poverty will make people come in your house and say, "Motherfucker, you in a wheelchair, what the fuck are you talking about? You had \$50 million, and what did you do with it? Fuck that—lemme have a dollar."

GT: *How did success separate you from the people on the street, from the very thing that had made you successful?*

RP: I never understood that having a dollar made me different or separate like you say. I never understood that the way, maybe, other people do. But them's the breaks, hey? Makes me sad... not remembering what I was going to say. I was going to say something. It was standing right there, and then I picked up this cigarette and it just said, "Fuck you."

GT: *Folks say success doesn't change you, but changes the people around you. Is that what happened?*

RP: Yep. My Uncle Dickie.

JL: Yeah, he used to cry, "Oh, Richard, I just need \$50,000 to get that damn truck out the garage."

RP: Damn, what a paint job. Better have some sparkles.

JL: No, he'd come back the next day with rhinestone glasses with his initials and a truckful of 'pot and a new pink polyester suit and 10 women on each arm. Dickie was terribly lovable to Richard, and he knew it.

RP: He was what he was and I always thought, "If my father were alive, he wouldn't do this to me."

JL: No, Buck would have kicked some ass.

RP: Yes, I know so. But also, the other side of that is, kicking ass was a bad habit with Buck. His leg would start

kicking, and he didn't know how to control it. He'd say, "Down, leg! Cause your ass could go too."

PH: *We got to say, man, we're trying to get you to understand that you can take That Nigger's Crazy, put it on at a gathering of black folks in 1995, and you could still stop a party. With the wino and the junkie, and the cat hollering at Dracula—that breakthrough stuff I know you can't stand up onstage, but what do you think about in terms of storytelling now?*

RP: I don't know that I think of anything. I think I'm tired. That's okay, but I'm tired.

PH: *What about a Mudbone movie? The way films are done, you could do the whole Mudbone character sitting.*

JL: Some people are interested in purchasing the rights and writing with Richard. I think Richard is Mudbone now.

GT: *It is important to you that your work is remembered? That you have a legacy?*

RP: Yes, very much so. And you gentlemen have impressed upon me that I'm alive. I feel like that Frankenstein movie—"Is he alive!" [We are interrupted by the sound of a helicopter overhead.] I have dreams about a helicopter crashing in my backyard. In the dream, I run out and help the people. Then the helicopter blows up. Only I don't know if the helicopter blew up while I was out there, or after I left. So that's a thought I have all the time. What am I going to do when this helicopter crashes for real in the yard? I don't know if I'll go out and try to help the people, or if I'll stand in the doorway and go, "It's gonna blow!"

PH: *Have you figured out any mysteries you didn't know how to answer in the early days?*

RP: I'm glad I didn't go to heroin. That was a mystery.

GT: *What was the difference between that and cocaine for you?*

RP: Good question. Stalling, stalling. Cocaine. I don't want to have to think about it.

JL: Coke just kept you up for five days and made you pass out for five years.

RP: One thing about coke was, I used to go to sleep and wake up and didn't know that I'd been asleep.

JL: Yeah, absolutely. You didn't get REM with that.

GT: *You get sleep.*

RP: Hey, man, the hell I saw that time when I walked in the hall and saw a man—Jennifer said it was the devil, but I thought it was me, only skinnier than me, in black shorts. He walked through a door, then he walked across me and I said, "I'm going to leave this guy alone." I went into my room, looked around, and said, "I saw me, skinny, in black underwear, and in my mind it was real." Nobody believed me.

JL: I think it was you, as the devil incarnate in reverse, taking you to hell....

RP: Oh.

JL: [Laughing at herself] I do.

GT: *In the book, you profess that God is now asking, "Hey, Rich, you ever heard the phrase 'delayed gratification'?" ... Good. "Cause you've done had a lot of gratification.... Well, now comes the delay."*

RP: See, the difference between me and other motherfuckers is I want all the pussy. If there's three or four billion women in the world, eventually I want to fuck 'em all. And I will.

JL: [Sighs] You've had enough, Richard, to last 10 lifetimes.

RP: There can never be enough to last 10 lifetimes. I'm sorry. ☐

Raging at bull.



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FLOWER POWER

"Acting is not about your ego,"
says Joan Chen, "it's about your characters."

For Joan Chen, costar of *Judge Dredd* and China's biggest screen idol, good acting is all about

Taking on the Flavor

By Howard Feinstein

Stallone and I only had one scene together in *Judge Dredd*: I shoved a big rifle into his butt," says the stunning Joan Chen, who plays Lisa, a "bitch in leotards," in the futuristic fantasy flick based on the character who first appeared in the ultraviolent U.K. comic book 2000 A.D. While portraying the Third Millennium's archvillainess, Chen got into her character so much, she dispensed with a stunt double for much of the kick-boxing catfight with good girl Diane Lane. "It's an action picture," says the astute 34-year-old screen siren. "It's not a part I can elevate into anything profound."

When she wasn't kicking ass or threatening the future of civilization, Chen kept her cool by practicing her putts with Sly on the miniature golf course he had built on the soundstage. "Joan is a chameleon," says one on-set observer. "She's very controlled, and she changes completely, depending on what she's wearing and how she's made up."

For the Chinese-born actress, that's the greatest compliment: "Zhang Rei Fang [the Shanghai Film Studio acting coach who is Chen's mentor] compared a good actor to a good piece of bean curd," she says. "It takes on the flavor of whatever you cook it with." And Chen has had a wide variety of flavors to soak up in her 20-year career. When she was 14 and studying acting, Chen Chong, as she was known then, got her first part in a movie, but production ceased when China's infamous Gang of Four was toppled. After the coup attempt, she went on to play an innocent girl searching for her family after the 1911 civil war in *Little Flower*, a hugely popular film that instantly made her China's biggest movie star.

Even though they loved her in Shanghai, Tinseltown was another story. "I started from scratch here," she says. "Many Hong Kong film actors and actresses have tried Hollywood. They're stars at home, and it's difficult for them to audition and be rejected. What sustains my Hong Kong career now is that the Hong Kong audience's respect comes from my breaking ground here." And that respect has raised her to a Liz Taylor-esque sort of fame once unthinkable in her

hometown: Chen just launched her own perfume back home called Little Flower.

She first brought her talents to these shores in 1986 with a role in *Tai-Pan*. More challenging and less predictable roles soon followed: the opium-addicted empress in Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, the tortured Vietnamese mother in Oliver Stone's *Heaven and Earth*, the hooker's daughter who gets killed off early in J.F. Lawton's *The Hunted*, and a native Alaskan environmental activist in Steven Seagal's *On Deadly Ground*. "Zhang Rei Fang taught me that acting is not about your ego," recalls Chen, "it's about your characters."

To date, she has performed in only one Asian-American film: *Golden Gate*, (costarring Matt Dillon), from a script by her friend, Chinese-American playwright David Henry Hwang. She's lost out to two others that became Stateside hits: *The Joy Luck Club* (because of her *Heaven and Earth* commitment) and *The Wedding Banquet*. But still, last summer Chen received Asian Cine Vision's 1994 Asian American Media Award in New York.

Now she's thinking about directing her own project at the Shanghai Film Studio and has cowritten *Mosquito Net*, with Anchee Min, based on Min's autobiographical novel. The story centers around a female member of the Little Red Guard who denounces her teacher, is sent to the countryside for "reeducation," and strikes up a same-sex affair with her superior. "The world is paying more attention to Asian and Asian-American films," Chen notes, "because the Pacific Rim is so economically important."

Nevertheless, Chen doesn't feel compelled to play only Chinese roles. "Meryl Streep played Polish in *Sophie's Choice*," she points out. "Liam Neeson played a Czech in *Schindler's List*, and he's Irish. It's okay for me to play other races and ethnic types, as long as the characters are not talking gibberish, and as long as you know I'm Chinese, but I'm playing something else. Judging by her latest ball-busting performance, the Little Flower is the heavyweight flavor of the future. ☐

Y'all wanna have some church up in here?

Kirk Franklin is *all* over the stage. When he's not directing his 20-member group, known as the Family, he encourages the thrilled Chicago audience to join in a call-and-response sing-along. And between breakdowns he goes straight to one of the hottest songs of last winter: "The most beautiful thing in the world," Franklin exclaims, paraphrasing Keith Murray, "is getting saved." The crowd, hands in the air, screams in recognition and validation.

Along with Hezekiah Walker and John P. Kee, the hypercharismatic Franklin, 25 (he's been preaching since he was 17), is at the forefront of today's gospel music. With his vivid Versace gear and humble-but-still-fierce attitude, Franklin is the hip-hop generation's own spiritual star. "If you don't know," he says into the mike—about Jesus—"now you know."

Raised a "piano boy" in the rough Riverside neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas, Franklin was living a dual life: one in the church and one in the streets. "I was doing a lot of things," he says, "to show people I wasn't a punk." When he was 15, a close friend of his was killed in a fight. "It literally scared the hell out of me." So he gave up the double life: Right before his 18th birthday, he became assistant director and associate songwriter of the Dallas-Fort Worth Mass Choir.

Directing choirs, writing songs, and working on other people's recordings since he was 12 years old, Franklin formed the Family in 1992 and shopped the self-produced live demo that would become *Kirk Franklin and the Family*. The album, with the hit "Why We Sing" as well as other ecstatic numbers like "Silver & Gold" and "He's Able," was already riding high on the gospel chart when a February 1994 Arsenio appearance sparked Franklin's crossover to the R&B charts.

"It's a big jump," Franklin says of leaving the Mass Choir and concentrating on the Family. "But I had to let people know that it's all about Christ. And it's not easy—our society doesn't want to hear the word Jesus." Maybe not, but people do want to hear Franklin. The album's gone gold, and his rousing performances sell out all over the country. "I love being onstage," he says. "I love touching folks' hearts."

Dave Helland

KIRK FRANKLIN AND THE FAMILY

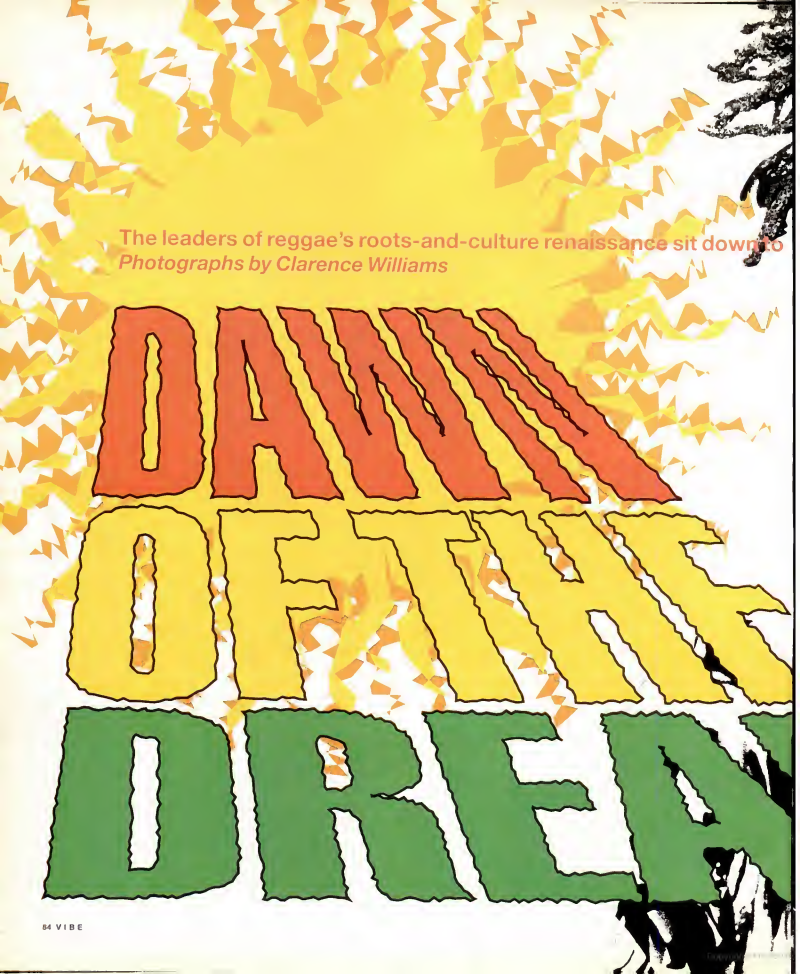
He sings because he's happy

CLIP



YOU BETTER ASK SOMEBODY.





The leaders of reggae's roots-and-culture renaissance sit down to
Photographs by Clarence Williams

DAWN OF THAT DREAM



PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN JAMES

reason about music, redemption, and the judgment to come. *By Sharon Gardon.*

GARNET SILK
Out in a blaze of glory

Reggae was born in the ghettos of Jamaica as the music of the masses. No "uptowners" had any dealings with it. The raw drums and bass—to say nothing of the uncompromising lyrics—were too hard and strong for their faint hearts.

In the early 1980s, dancehall-style reggae—the precursor to hip hop, in which singers and DJs delivered live lyrics over recorded riddim tracks—began to dominate the scene. Young talents lacking studio time or band fees were developing their skills on sound systems. At its best, dancehall was fresh, spontaneous, and exciting.

But by the close of the decade, reggae was losing its vital essence. Roots artists like the Abyssinians and Burning Spear kept doing what they'd always done, but their efforts were buried under an avalanche of dancehall tunes. The new music became associated with a glamorized vision of guns, sex, and violence. This shift mirrored the worsening economic, social, and political climate in Jamaica. The neg-

ative behavior of a few made the dancehall an increasingly unsafe place to be.

Toward the end of 1994, though, there was yet another change. Hardcore DJs like Buju Banton and Capleton (who both dabbled in slackness and gun tunes earlier in their careers) began growing dreadlocks and delivering a steady dose of cultural lyrics. Others followed, some sincerely, some not. People were "locking" their hair and praising Jah in massive amounts. Some observers attributed this cultural renaissance to the recent deaths of top entertainers, others dismissed it as a fad, and still others saw a larger force at work.

The time seemed right for a discussion among conscious dancehall artists from several generations. Besides Capleton (also known as the Prophet) and Buju Banton (whose new album, *Til Shiloh*, with its rhymin'hi drums and guitar strumming speaks to roots reggae and dancehall fans alike), we set out to talk with Tony Rebel (a consistently conscious DJ who made his name with tunes like "Fresh Vegetable" and "Teach the Children"), Angie Angel (a female DJ who went from chatting about sex to chanting "Selassie-I"), and U Roy, a 30-year reggae veteran who is considered the godfather of dancehall style. Last but not least, we invited a young Rastafarian singer named Garnet Silk, whose spiritual anthems helped spark dancehall's cultural revival. The roundtable discussion seemed to be on course. On Friday, December 9, the last of the artists confirmed: We heard from Garnet Silk's people that he would be glad to take part in such a constructive conversation.

But it was not to be. Early Saturday morning, December 10, the phone rang. My stomach ached the way it usually does whenever someone calls at that hour. "Dem kill Garnet" was all I heard. I slowly gathered that there had been a terrible fire at the house of the singer's mother. Then sobs filled the phone line. The voice on the other end was my breddren Captain Remo, an up-and-coming DJ out of Tony Rebel's crew. He tried to control his emotions. After all, as a Rasta, the custom was that one should not mourn the dead.

We did not mourn, nor did we abandon our plans. Circumstances following Garnet's death made it impossible for everyone to gather in the place. The vibe was strange. I managed to track down the surviving artists and ask their interpretation of all these events. The results have been combined to approximate the sort of conversation that might have taken place had all been gathered together.

VIBE: Let's start from the roots. What are the origins of reggae music?

REBEL: Reggae is a vehicle Jah pro-

vide fe take him message to the four corners. I don't think reggae started just the other day as these historians would have us believe. It is an old African tradition which has been modified by modern times. Reggae is the music of the drum and bass line. The drum was the original communication I-and-I used in Africa.

VIBE: But today reggae is loved by all kinds of people.

REBEL: Because reggae is the heartbeat. Just like how your heart beat in a certain way, so the pulsating sound of the drums go. So when a man play reggae is like you feel it. African people are the origination of it, but you find other people can relate to it too. Because all generations come through our roots. No matter the different complexion, you still have the roots in you, so when the music play you can identify.

VIBE: Reggae has a certain spirituality, the sound, the feel, the lyrics....

REBEL: Exactly, 'cause is a God thing. The whole nucleus of reggae music is spirituality.

VIBE: Is reggae synonymous with Rasta?

BUJU: Well, it was, but recently they try to put a change between it. When Bob Marley dead, 'nuff man get weak, you know.

VIBE: You're referring to the X-rated and gun lyrics?

BUJU: A different generation arise, you know. And that is what we saw through the media and what was shown to us as lessons to be learned.

UROY: Talking 'bout you gun only boost up violence. I don't believe in those things, but the media push them 'pon the people. Is like the youth find out this is what the media love, so them just give it to the people. The youth no know better; them do anything that can make them some money.

VIBE: How do you account for this return of culture in the dancehall night now?

CAPLETON: I wouldn't say "return" because the culture never really gone nowhere. It did just need somebody fe enforce it.

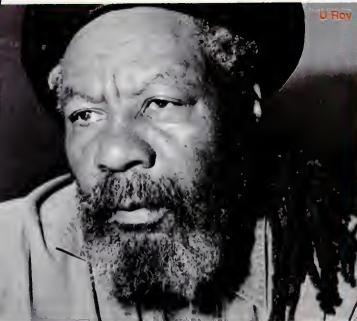
ANGEL: The return of roots and culture in the dance night now is a mystical thing. People might think it's just in church alone you know 'bout God. But everyone fe know about him. Anyway, Father God say, "What is hidden from the wise and prudent now reveal to the babes and suckling."

BUJU: Why happen is Jah have to be praised in the township, the churches, the rural parts, everywhere. And he called upon the youths because we are strong. We are the soldiers. We have to clean up this business thoroughly, you understand?

VIBE: Why is everybody moving

Tony Rebel





U Roy



Capleton

this way right now?

BUJU: I wouldn't say that I have enough knowledge to answer such a question, but the Lord knows—ever since the evolution of this music. If one check out where the word *reggae* comes from, it's a Latin word meaning "king," so reggae music is the King's music. He knows what he has in store for this music. In this time which is so terrible on earth, He raises us up as a little island for all mankind to behold. Reggae music has made Jamaica known in every realm of the world.

REBEL: Them forced to stop talking slackness. Them nuh have a choice. What else you can tell a man 'bout the gun? Yet there is so much things within I-and-I history to know.

VIBE: Like what, for instance?

REBEL: We need to tell people about historical facts, even about the pyramids in Egypt and the hieroglyphics that are written there.

CAPLETON: I-and-I have been brainwash-educated and enslaved, and I-and-I need fe motivate each other 'pon things we haven't acknowledged. Marcus Garvey say, "A people without a knowledge of them own history is like a tree without roots." Them no teach nothing 'bout we self as black people in school. We need fe know 'bout we ancient ancestors. We need fe know the world start from dynasties. It no start from the Greek them nor the Roman them. So we just haffi uplift I-and-I black supremacy.

BUJU: I can't tell a next man what to write. But conscious lyrics don't really have to base upon "Jah, Jah, Jah." It has to be based upon the basic suffering of the people. We haffi address certain things that are affecting the people.

REBEL: If you ah go tell them 'bout the gun, tell it inna positive way—make them know it serve only one purpose. Big up we Nubian queen, make them know them ah the mother fe the earth and fe hold them vibes together. Because without Mama, there would be nobody else.

VIBE: Nowadays many entertainers are twisting up their hair and shouting "Jah." How do you feel about that?

CAPLETON: I-and-I glad fe that, even though you have a lot of "bandwagonist." From one try seek righteousness, I-and-I glorify, but we be unto the man who know his words come from him tongue and not him heart. That mean a man no bother jump up and say "Jah" and "Selassie-I" through him want to make a few shilling. Every man have a right fe decide him own destiny, but in this judgment there is no partiality.

BUJU: Well, 'nuff of them a wolf in sheep clothing, and I say lightning, fire, brimstone... 'cause no false prophet

shall lead Jah children to a false throne.

ANGEL: 'Nuff people think this Rasta thing is a vanity thing and we just do it fe make some money, but it's not so. This is an inborn concept that reveal, and right now Jah ah take time and choose him people one by one.

VIBE: But you didn't always sing the cleanest music, did you?

ANGEL: I-and-I used to deejay some X-rated lyrics. And me ah tell you de truth, I-and-I was blind to certain things still. I-and-I never know that when you deal with reggae music, you could be so inspired that you do positive things to educate people. I-and-I did just feel if I sing 'bout sex, it would be some money-making ting.

VIBE: Buju, how long have you been growing dreads?

BUJU: I actually started about a year and a third ago. I decide to take the Nazirite vow and make sure everyone around I know say Rastafari is the way.

VIBE: When did you decide to devote your life to Jah?

BUJU: Is not a decision, you know; is more that knowledge increases through the passage of time and through the passage of time this has been happening... and my life is an open book.

VIBE: Did you have Jah on your mind when you first got involved in music?

CAPLETON: No, it all start from 'bout eight, nine, beating pans on the sidewalk and them thing deh. Drums and friends playing bass with them mouth. Yeah, man, that was before me get to know my real self.

VIBE: What do you mean, your real self?

CAPLETON: Me is a youth whey dem baptize inna church and Jesus this and *reggae* that.

VIBE: So when you started to deejay you rebelled against that?

CAPLETON: Yeah, man, me did haffi leave the church, 'cause no substance no deh deh. When me check the church ting, Anglican no like Baptist, Baptist no like Catholic. Everybody supposed to worship the same God. Something really no right.

VIBE: But earlier in your career, you didn't perform strictly cultural tunes.

CAPLETON: Listen to my tune "Trinity," because me make it clear to the people: "I was once lost but now I'm found." Me never deh 'pon the right track.

VIBE: How did the lyrics of your hit single "Tour" come about?

CAPLETON: It was just a natural vibe. Me did just come off tour, and the pope was in Jamaica. And I see DJ ah fight 'gainst DJ. Panhead and Dirtsman did get cut out. So me say, "It seems like the people them no love Jah no more," and "If slackness ah the sickness, then

culture ah the cure." Nuff man used to dis Rasta, but them no bother dis Rasta no more. So me just make the people know them fe "answer to Jah when make him knock 'pon the door," 'cause if you ignore, you ah go perish fe sure." The whole concept of the lyrics is to exclude slackness and uplift culture, because, as I say, righteousness exalt the nation.

VIBE: U Roy, after 30 years in the business, what's your view of all this?

U ROY: I used to play sound like King Tubby's, and that was the baddest sound system I ever play. Tubby was a man who is like a genius, you know. Tubby build him own amplifiers, he had his own engineer works in the studio, I really have him as the best. That hard-driving reggae beat, that dub music, Tubby's have a lot to do with that. But is like something go wrong with him. Is like him never right with Jah.

VIBE: Where is King Tubby now?

U ROY: He's dead.

VIBE: What were the circumstances under which he died?

U ROY: About five years ago, I hear that some man just go ah him house and wait until him drive in and shoot him. Just so. It really sad fe know, but is like Father works. I believe if him did know Jah, him would be living up to this day, believe you me.

VIBE: King Tubby wasn't a Rastaman?

U ROY: No, but you don't have to be a Rasta to know Jah. There are a lot of people who dread and don't know Jah. A lot of bald-heads even more conscious than 'nuff dreadlocks. Is just that King Tubby's never believe in God. Him believe inna scientist and people why go ah Moon—they little things deh. When I ask him who him think create them people...him never take it serious.

VIBE: People say that Rastamen are violent, that they treat their women negatively, that they just want to smoke and call out Jah's name....

REBEL: I know many Rastas who don't smoke. And Rastaman nuh really violent. The system set itself fe fight against Rasta and their concepts, so them put on the armor of defense. How can you pass judgment about a Rastaman and you don't know the man? You see him go through with a screwface, but maybe his heart is smiling. The whole Rasta thing is based on love.

ANGEL: If you love Jah and decide to give your life to him, you get 'nuff fight. When people see me walk the street, them can't believe it's Angie Angel who used to wear false hair and now she's wearing dreadlocks. When me walk barefooted, them say me mad. But them no know ah higher heights me reach.

U ROY: When me start say "Rasta," me get some of the biggest fight from my family, but me don't make that be a problem. The only way to stop me is to kill me, and that's if you have dem power deh. Rastafari is my religion. Just like I have Catholic, you have Rastafari religion. Some people pray to cow, some people pray to trees, I pray to Jah.

VIBE: And Jah is?

U ROY: Some people call him Jesus, some call him Allah; I think is the same Jah.

REBEL: Jah is the omnipotent, omniscient force. In this time we see his personality manifested in His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie-I.

VIBE: But wasn't he this king that used to be in

Ethiopia?

CAPLETON: I used to think that too, but when I-and-I go back and check, I really get fe understand. Them say heaven is in the sky and God is a spirit. But God couldn't be a spirit, because God say him create man in his own image, so we haifi look fe God as a man like we self. A natural man, not the white picture 'pon the wall. We want the people fe know the world no start from nuh Adam and Eve. Is our ancient history them ah try portray: Isis, Orus, and Osiris. Babylon is just a imitator.

U ROY: People say a lot of things. That's why people who say Jah dead can't talk to me; them can't even show me a photograph of his casket or where him bury. Some years ago some pope died and 'nuff program 'pon the radio make you know this pope dead and today is his funeral *ray, ray, ray*. And you wan' tell me that the King of Kings, the earth's longest reigning monarch is dead, and you can't show me a funeral fe him? Them can't talk to me; I don't want to hear any-



thing from anybody. *Where the King of Kings deh? Where you bury him? Why you do with him?*

CAPLETON: His Majesty make the highest talk inna the world, that no guy can go round: Him say, "Until the philosophy which hold one race superior and another inferior is permanently and finally discredited and abandoned, is just war still." So ah just some simple little things. Ah no big thing fe know Jah, ah nuh Ph.D. Just ah inborn thing. Seen?

REBEL: God is a title. God is not one person. He is within men—like the natural mystic that is flowing in the air. I pray to the Supreme Being, which manifested himself in Jesus and who now manifest himself in His Imperial Majesty.

VIBE: That's how you have Garnet singing a song like "Christ in His Kingly Character"?

REBEL: That was Christ returning through His Imperial Majesty. This time he won't be any lamb to the slaughter, but the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

VIBE: What about Garnet Silk and the way he burned to death?

U ROY: Well, it's shocking to everyone. But me can't really say nothing. Only Jah can create life and him can take it. My word don't count.

REBEL: It's obvious Garnet come fe deal with some prophetic works. All the blind see that. The Bible show us that when Jah spoke to Moses, it was fire. And when him depart Elijah from Elisha it was a chariot of fire. So it's obvious that when Jah deal with him soldiers, him deal with fire. Most people who just deal with physical can't fathom the mystery of what took place with Garnet.

VIBE: Buju, recently onstage you raised a question as to the cause of Garnet's death.

BUJU: Garnet was a good youth, and I wonder if his killing was really murder, seen? Till the end of time I'll continually wonder.

VIBE: On your new album, you sing a duet called "Complaint" with Garnet, whom you call the Archangel.

BUJU: That was done quite some time before the disappearance of our brenden, but everything was for a wise purpose. That song is like a conversation: I say, "Let Jah arise and the heathen scatter. Have to give thanks and praises no matter. Even if the flames get hotter and hotter, everybody should ah know, and don't believe inna rumor. Children arise from your sleep and slumber, no come yah so fe bow, we come yah so fe conquer." That's the utterance.

VIBE: Wasn't Garnet important to your discovering Jah, Angie?

ANGEL: Garnet Silk was the first man who tell me, Angel, when you start preach reality no other DJ girl can talk to you. Me remember when I-and-I and Garnet work 'pon the same show. Me rush from the hotel, hurry up and go 'pon stage and deejay X amount of slack lyrics before Garnet come. Me show Garnet respect; me nuh want him hear it. But I-and-I didn't have the wisdom fe know it's not just Garnet. What about the Supreme Being?

VIBE: And since then you've devoted your music to cultural subjects?

ANGEL: You haifi just gwan do your works. Do it with honor, 'cause right now we light hafni shine before men so them can see the good work and come worship Jah. Garnet pass, but he know him inna the arms of Selassie-I, waiting for his brendens and sistrens to come in.

VIBE: Anything else to say to the people reading this?

REBEL: In this time and going up into the 21st century, there will be a terrible judgment inna earth. Right now a youth fe just trust Jah and make Jah lead him. Pray sincerely and walk circumspect—not as fools but as warriors in this time, 'cause now the days are evil.

BUJU: Be strong, 'cause now is the time de Bible prophesy 'bout. This is the revelation we are living in—all the treacherous things, all the evilous things, all that is to come, this is just a preview. Steadfast and just know yourself.

ANGEL: You must always look fe do the positive, not the negative, 'cause 'pon the right-hand side ah Zion, and 'pon the left-hand side ah destruction, seen? Two road before all ah we: There is hell and there is Zion, and we haifi pick we choice. Fe real. ■

aiwa
Turn Me On™



A YOUNGER BROTHER WHO'S UP ON REALITY: DJ Quik

QuikKer Than Most

Slow down: DJ Quik talks about phat funk and lite gangbanging. *By Cheo H. Coker*



Rhodes Eighty-Eight keyboard.

Quik's trademark perm is separated into tiny braids. He wears a Hawaiian shirt, faded jeans, and Flies. A wavy guitar line floats from two huge monitors, and Quik twists knobs until the sound is fattened up to his specifications. "Mixing is the most important part of the recording process," Quik says. "It's what people really listen to." With a bottle of Miller in his hand—he gave up marijuana as his relaxant of choice—he walks around the board, pushing more buttons. Then Jewell's hard-hitting voice envelops the room like a lover's whisper.

"Good cooking is characterized by the seasonings," explains Quik. "Like, if you have gumbo, you want to taste the rice, and you want to be able to tell the difference between the crab and the okra. That's how mixing is: You need to hear the kick, you need to hear vocals loud—not too loud—but clear. It's just like cooking," he says with a confident nod of his head. "And I can cook too."

Growing up in Compton, DJ Quik was surrounded by what he calls "the decline of hope." But he was also surrounded by the music of War, the Ohio Players, Con Funk Shun, and other funk-da-mental groups that ended up shaping his sound. While music didn't completely steer Quik away from the gangsters running his neck of the woods, it did help him focus on what he really wanted to do with his life—while also maintaining respect on the street.

"My decision, ultimately, was music," he says. "I didn't think my peers would be down with that, but I made [my music] important to them too. When they felt like kickin' it, I'd be playing music, making them feel good. That's how I learned to make music that moved people; certain grooves will always move people."

Using that knowledge, Quik created 1991's almost-platinum *Quik Is the Name*. He became rich and famous at age 20, but after recording a second album he can't even listen to ("Way 2 Fonky was poorly executed," he says of the 1992 disc that went gold anyway) and recording a third that he never released ("Garbage, turmoil on tape"), Quik kicked the dead weight in his personal life to the curb, put his crew in check, and got a manager he trusts (Death Row's redoubtable Marion "Suge" Knight). Shortly thereafter, Quik recorded *Safe + Sound*, his best album to date. To find the grooves that would continue to move people, he had to look inside once more.

"To the old sounds," he says. "To the old ways. Computers don't have

any type of rhythm or feeling. They're robots. My shit is straight, unadulterated, pure, uncut, raw. True musicianship. Without a lot of loops."

In other words, G-funk?

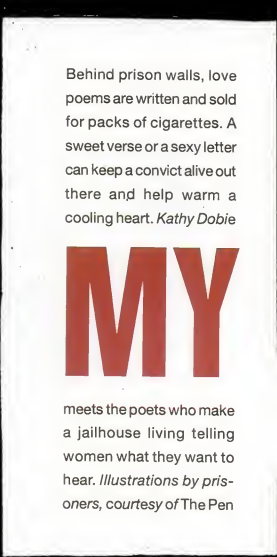
"Nah," he says, bristling at the term. "With all respect to Warren G, Snoop, and the Dogg Pound, I don't want anybody to call my music G-funk. What I'm kicking is really P-Funk. Not P for 'Piru,' " he says, referring to the segment of the L.A. gang he's often associated with. "But P-Funk in the 'Parliament-Funkadelic' sense—funk with a happy and a bad side."

Safe + Sound balances razor-sharp drums, haunting organs, and complex string arrangements. But the gangsta element isn't as minor as he makes it seem. Whether it's the preponderance of red on the album cover, the C (for "Crip") missing from his moniker, or his allusions and shout-outs to Tree Top Piru Bloods, Quik definitely lets listeners know on which side of the street he stands.

"There's a difference between representing your neighborhood and gangbanging actively," Quik volunteers. "If you're out there doing shit, shooting at muthafuckas, throwing up sets, you're gangbanging. But if your neighborhood is in your heart, people will respect you. If you ask me where I'm from, I'll say, 'Tree Top Pi-muthafuckin'-ru. You gotta problem with that?' " As he sounds off this mantra in a drill sergeant cadence, the laid-back expression that's usually on his face hardens into a stone mask. "But if you say, 'Nigga, what set you claiming?' I say, 'Nigga, I ain't claiming no set, I ain't gangbanging. For your information, this is West-side Trees I'm on.' "

A couple of years ago, Quik came back to Compton from the more suburban Rialto—bringing along his longtime companion, Cookie; his daughter, Dijon, three; and his infant son, David Jr.—looking to build on his hometown roots. "I want muthafuckas to know that they don't have to go through what I went through. Only you make your bed hard," he says, his fingers resting lightly on the electric-plano keys. "But no matter what, I'm a winner. If I got a drum machine, monitors, and a sound source, I can get open. I'll quit before I fail." □





Behind prison walls, love poems are written and sold for packs of cigarettes. A sweet verse or a sexy letter can keep a convict alive out there and help warm a cooling heart. *Kathy Dobie*

MY

meets the poets who make a jailhouse living telling women what they want to hear. *Illustrations by prisoners, courtesy of The Pen*



*You stayed for the good
And ran from the bad.
Now they call me a hood
My existence is said...
—George Warwick, Attica*

Imagine George Warwick, 37 years old, dressed in his State greens—a big man with big hands, blue eyes, and the coloring of a choirboy—walking the yard at Attica with his friend Harry. Harry's older, probably shorter. Does George incline his head as Harry talks? I don't think they look at each other much as they walk. No, their eyes flick like fireflies over the yard.

This time, George is in for impersonating a cop and robbing two drug dealers. His alleged accomplice was never identified, which can mean only one thing: George didn't tell. Inside, he has a rep as a stand-up white guy. A black prisoner tells me he respects George because "George fights the cops."

George the con has a kind of glory about him, an aura—"This is my house," he told a cowering prisoner once. "I was raised in these prisons." But George isn't very impressed with his own reputation. There was his attempted escape from Rikers on another bid, and a takeover of a wing of the Bronx House of Detention where four cops were taken hostage (George says he played his part reluctantly, forced by jailhouse loyalties). He refers to these criminal adventures, if he refers to them at all, as "my past—uhh—escapes."

SHACKLED LOVE

So imagine George Warwick, casual in his State greens, serving his eight-and-a-half to 17, his heart still raw over the wife who left him, strolling the yard and considering Harry's request for a love poem.

Harry's going a-courting. He's sending a woman two lovebirds, and he wants a poem to go with them. Would George write him one? Ordinarily it would cost him a pack of cigarettes, but they're friends. George asks Harry about his feelings for her, and back in his cell, he works on the poem for the next two weeks. It's about lovebirds in a cage.

Imagine George there, at his typewriter, quickly running through the words that rhyme with "cage." George working through milky memories, his own love/hate for his wife, seizing on the sweetness left there. George trying, as he later puts it, "to stand in Harry's shoes." George adopting a kind of wooden formality, partly forced by the ABAB rhyme scheme he uses, but partly because of his own sentimentality. George, the convict, the notorious escapee, the three-time loser, "playing Cupid, I guess."

A prison love poem. What is that creature—a rude boy all dressed up in his Sunday best? The real bleeding heart beating louder in the quiet of that four-by-eight? One thing's for sure: Inside these walls, love poetry is a vital art. The love poem is the only gift a prisoner can truly give his girl, his woman, his wife, his child, his mother. It takes the place of diamond rings and flower

bouquets and Godiva chocolates," writes Aush Byla, editor of *The Pen*, a journal of inmate writing from the New York City jails. George Warwick wrote his first poems for *The Pen*, all but one about his faithless wife. He appeared in four issues (mailed every one off to her) before he was sent upstate to Attica.

The best prison love poems come with their borders decorated: flowers, birds, fat hearts daggered and leaking tears ("Sometimes friendship can hurt so deep...so let's make ours work, baby!!"). In *The Pen*, there's a drawing of a heart in handcuffs—"My Shackled Love." In another drawing, a man's shackles are split apart by a crucifix and a heart as big as the moon. Love hurts, love heals, and art in the service of that love is a booming jailhouse industry, like Hallmark out here.

Poems are sent as an apology to Mus for messing up again, a plea to the wife to stay faithful and, of course, they're sent to romance, to win hearts. The men call it "pulling a woman," and I'll never see another prisoner without imagining fishing lines draped over the walls, snaking past guard towers, slipping through barbed wire. Sometimes, they meet women through personal ads or pen-pal services, but most often it's just one con introducing another to his girlfriend's sister or his sister's girlfriend, plugging him in, hooking him up so he can get his. It's a courtship conducted against the odds; a courtship where the man is hugely handicapped, like fighting with one hand tied behind your back. They pull her with poems and love letters, envelopes scented with

Muslim oils bought at the commissary.

The writer and the artist are the cupids of prison love. And because of that, they have the chance to become, as Aush Byla puts it, "upper-class cons." There are many ways to get paid inside: You can sell drugs, give haircuts, tattoos. Jailhouse lawyers are among the highest paid—because they can get you out. But while you're in, only artists and writers can connect you with the world out there. "See, while we're in population, if we have a relationship or a potential for a relationship, the very lifeblood is writing," a prisoner explains. "So the guys wanna go to the best."

Cigarettes are money inside since prisoners aren't allowed to handle any cash. A poem or a love letter can be bought for one pack, but the price goes up if the borders are decorated or if the poem is done in calligraphy. A warden tells me, "Some of these guys have an excellent hand," talking about something only my great-aunt ever cared about: penmanship—an elegant, flowing script.

"Ever read Cyranó?" I ask one poet/prisoner.

"No doubt, no doubt. And sometimes I think of myself like that," he replies easily. "Because I'm doing in how I look. But I'm good at talking. So a guy might be, like, 'Yo, I just met this girl. You can write this scribe?' I would hate for somebody who is not literate, who's kind of illiterate, for them to sound like, 'Yo! Whassup, baby? I love you.'"

There are the guys inside who are illiterate ("Yo,



ILLUSTRATION BY A. SHUMER

baby!"). And then there are the guys who actually can't read or write—and they're at the mercy of those who do. Men have been known to start writing love letters for another prisoner and then decide—perhaps it's her offer to send money, maybe it's the photo she finally sends—to steal the girl for themselves. "But that's what we call an alley-cat move," says Enrique Acevedo with disdain. He won't take any payment for writing. "I'm very selective and very stingy and I'm like this—he makes a fist—with what's mine. And there's not enough money in the world that you can pay me because I'm the one that's using the brains."

Enrique's serving two to four on a gun charge. When I see him, he's locked up at Franklin Correctional on the Canadian border. The visiting room is empty because on weekdays the medium security joints don't allow visitors. One guard stands watch over us.

"Gametight," Enrique lays the word out, like a jewel unwrapped on the table. "Okay?" He's gonna school me. That's the way it's gonna be. He's in charge. He's a man of the streets, the man inside the joint, the *Man*, period.

"Now I'm gonna talk street so you can understand," he says, leaning forward and looking intently at me. "A lot of guys, they're not gametight. They write this corny stuff—'Dear love, by the time this letter reaches its destination...' No, no, no, no, no. Plain and simple is the best way." His accent, the deep, crackly voice—look at the scars on his neck, a knife went in there and played with his vocal cords—is very sexy, as is his arrogance. He has black, twinkly eyes, white, white teeth, a cherub's face. He looks younger than his 33 years, and younger than that voice. He took his black-framed glasses off as soon as the guard brought him in and began patting him down.

Every prisoner wants a female to do his bid with him, Enrique says. Prisoners pull women for visits, for money, for food packages, for sex, for socks, for drugs, for love. If you're married, you can get trailer visits, and it looks better to the parole board when you have a wife and home to be released to. "You can have a guy, he'll pull her but she might not be really what he wants as far as looks and stuff like that, but right now, it's the moment. You need. Okay?" he says. "Everybody wants to feel wanted, especially in places like this where to show emotion is a sign of weakness." Enrique decided to do this bid alone, so he's not writing anyone but his mom. He writes letters for other guys, though.

"I wrote for a guy that had pulled a Christian female. He wanted something to write to her because now he said he expanded and he's more into Christ. To me, he's a dope fiend... but hey, tell me anything." Writing it was easy, Enrique shrugs, like any love letter, "except it was on a Christian level, like, 'Thank God we're together.'" Enrique told him, "When you pull it, just keep it for a little while."

He doesn't like to write for guys who are gonna drop the woman soon as they reel her in. I don't know if he's thinking about the woman's feelings as much as the waste of his words, his brainpower. "I've had guys write letters and then tell me, 'Read this and let me know.' I tell them, 'I'm gonna make corrections.' So, I got a red pen, and I pull it out...."

George Warwick told me that the men in Attica call certain women cows. They're usually big, fat local women, George said, who have no social life. In other words, they're as lonely out here as the prisoner is in there. The men, he says, "milk them for everything they got." In the urinal at one upstate prison, there's the graffiti: IF YOU WANT LOYALTY, GET YOURSELF A FAT BUFFALO GIRL. I repeat this to Enrique, he nods.

"You can milk a woman for all it's worth up here. You know why? Because these guys—Enrique makes a dis-

paraging nod at the white guard standing near us—"have no type of technique. They don't know how to wine and dine a woman." He sits there under the dry blue gaze of a guard, a guard who can jerk his lead at any moment.

The prisoners have yet another advantage, Enrique says. "They don't come across many blacks or Hispanics that live up in this area unless they're Oreos. So, if you give a girl the game—'cause that's what it is, it's *game*, all right?—you can manipulate through letters, paper and pen, and get what you want." So they're outlaws, they're exotic because of their skin color alone, and they talk better: sweeter, hotter, faster, funnier.

"A couple of guys wanted to hook me up with a young girl," Enrique says. "And I told them, 'Listen, I'm so deep that I'll write stuff and it'll go over her head like a Scud missile.'"

I ask Enrique if he thinks there are women out there who particularly like prisoners. "Yes, but I don't mess with



ENRIQUE ACEVEDO, FRANKLIN CORRECTIONAL:
"I'm the one that's using the brains."

them," he says—they're groupies who like thugs. "I mess with respectable women. Such as yourself," he says. "Such as myself." I repeat, waiting for him to grin, or squirm, or switch the subject. He doesn't even blink.

So I switch the subject. I ask him how the guards treat the men and their female visitors. "They do what's called shitting on you. Let's use you and me as an example," he says without missing a beat. "You come up on a visit—you're white, I'm not. Okay. When you come in, I grab you, I kiss you, and the whole nine. If he wants to be a pain in the ass, he'll make the visit miserable." Enrique shrugs. "They might try to do anything to keep me down, but when you're a hustler, a con man, you don't have to kiss ass."

When I ask him to define *hustler* for me, he says, "Most hustlers have no morals and no scruples. I do. If you want to do something for me out of the kindness of your heart, fine. But for me to write you and say, 'Send me this, send me that'—no."

Earlier, one of the guards out front decided to give me the lowdown on cons. He told me, "They'll lie to you." Then he asked, "Do you know why these guys attend drug rehab classes?" And answered his own ques-

tion: "It's because women civilians teach them." He said it scornfully, like it was a sign of their criminality, instead of their masculinity. Our guard, being a nice guy, moves us into a small legal room, so we can have some privacy, while he watches us from outside. But now in this little glass room, I feel the first guard's cynicism like a third, ghostly presence.

Enrique tells me that another convict challenged him once by asking, "How good a poet are you? Do me a poem."

"Give me a topic," Enrique said.

"Sex," Enrique says he recited a rhyme off the top of his head that had the guy stuttering. "Write it down and send it to me," I



*If I could, I'd reach into your heart
It would make no difference the distance*

*apart
Bringing you flowers, chocolates, cards, and
such*

*As a sign of my loving you so much
Poems also would be written by me
Of the finest caliber so all can see.*

*If I could, I'd buy a box
With a golden key and a golden lock*

*In it I'd keep my heart
To be with you while we're apart
If I could, I'd give you my soul
To keep until we're old*

*Since I can't give you any of this
There is something I just won't
miss*

*I shall give you all of myself
Not living in poverty or wealth
So that you can see my love is true
The decision is not mine
It's up to you.*



GEORGE WARWICK, ATTICA: "Sometimes the anger helps keep you alive in here."

So many of the love poems in *The Pen* are apologies, and so many of the drawings are of women's tears. In one, a man behind bars clutches a rosary, his face obscured by a cross; "Perdon Madre," it reads. Missing from *The Pen* are the erotic and pornographic images of women that the men draw in prison, and almost any suggestion of sex in the poems. When you first hit jail, you're filled with anger, fear, and regret, some of the men tell me, not sexual desire. But by the time they're sentenced and shipped upstate, she is everywhere, not any particular woman, but Woman, with her big titties and spike heels, her sly smile and tear-stained face.

"Oh, those guys got it easy inside. Three meals a day, their own TVs..." That's what people say, but only a nation of couch potatoes could think prisoners have got it made. The punishment of prison is the isolation, the loss of intimacy. It's the feeling that you've ceased to exist in the world out there. You breathe you walk you eat you holler, but you're that tree falling in the forest without a sound. You've died and gone to prison, baby. The love letters, the poems, the whole enterprise of pulling women come out of the prisoner's isolation and dependency—a terrible isolation and a childlike depen-

dency forced on grown men.

Freddie Bess has a round face, glasses; his beard's just beginning to go gray. When the guards at Sing Sing bring him through the metal doors, he looks bewildered. "What's your sentence?" I ask him. "Twelve-and-a-half to 25," he says, his voice barely audible. Freddie used to be a token booth clerk and coach Little League. But about six years ago, he began to feel like a nobody. He got his sentence for observed drug sale. "It hurts me the most—because I'm not out there helping my mother. She's diabetic, has high blood pressure," he says, clearing his throat. "Something I remember—when my grandmother passed away, I was by her bed in the hospital, she said, 'Take care of your mother.' And, uh, that hurts me, you know. I always think about that. Excuse me." He's got his hands under his glasses. He cries quietly, wraps it up quickly.

Freddie has sat in his cell, thinking. Forty-five years old, twelve-and-a-half to 25. So this is it. This is my epitaph. But somewhere in him, he has a rage against this kind of death, "and communication," he says, "is the most important factor in that rage."

He writes five to 10 letters a week—"lifelines," he calls them—and waits for the reply that says you're real, you're still alive. Any message coming back into that cell, any kind of mail will do the trick. The men send away for free literature. George Warwick has a cellful. Freddie answers ads in porn magazines—send \$5 and your sexual fantasy, and I'll send you some photos and my fantasy back. At Sing Sing, they give out mail at 4:00, after the prisoners are locked down. The men stick their mirrors out their cells, watching the officer, hoping...and trying not to hope too much.

While Freddie talks, the prisoner/photographer has started his workday. Each prison has its own photo backdrop, usually painted by a prisoner. In Attica, it's the New York City skyline. In Franklin, autumn woods and a stream. In Groveland, there's the Lion King and his cubs. And here in Sing Sing, it's Mickey Mouse handing a bouquet of roses to Minnie. Little red hearts fly out of their eyes. The prisoners wait in line to be photographed with their women, wrapped skin to skin, tongues down throats. The view, for Freddie, is half pleasure, half pain.

"One thing," he says sadly, "mothers are always there for you. Nobody else will be, but moms will be there." A grown man tied to his mom; a grown man who should be taking care of her. "Instead, I'm right back in a child's situation," Freddie says with self-disgust. He's making the collect call, asking for the food package. The men hate their dependency. They try to ask without asking. "You give them what they call 'indirects,'" Enrique says. If you need socks or boots, you write how cold it is up here, how the snow fell last night and it's a foot deep in the yard. Their helplessness enrages them. Possibly the most dangerous place to stand in a prison is behind a man calling his woman on the phone. No answer, a busy signal, another man answering, a block against his collect calls. "...How do I know what the fuck is going on I don't have any fucking letters from you!" I hear a man screaming when Freddie calls one evening.

"A lot of times, I avoid the phone just to stay away from that situation," Freddie says. "That's a situation that really hurts. I do a lot of writing."

Freddie's poem "Phone Jones," which was printed in *The Best of The Pen*, "got copied a lot by other prisoners. They send it out to their women as if they wrote it. Freddie says he doesn't mind—as long as his work speaks to them. "Phone Jones" and "Visits" ("Sweet at the beginning / And bitter at the end") are copied the most. They're the only two that are about communication with the outside world, Freddie reminds me.

tell him.

Enrique starts to laugh. "Oh God, I might think of you."

I try to think of something to say. "Uh...you said it was really raw?" He laughs again. "Raw and uncut."

"Send it anyway," I say, because I really want to see it and because he's not gonna turn me into some shy grade-school girl.

Enrique reads one of his love poems into the tape recorder, looking up at me while my gaze skips toward the window. For all our talk about sex, it's this moment that's the most squirmingly intimate as this hustler, this con, this complete stranger, in *man recites* his love poem while looking into my eyes.

ILLUSTRATION BY FRANK VALLETTA



LOVE
By Edwin Rosario
(Brooklyn House of Detention For Men)

Love is real
Real is love
Love is feeling
Feeling love
Love is you
You and me
Love is knowing
We can be

Love is wanting
Wanting love
Love is asking
To be loved

PHONE JONES

*As I sit here thinking about you, I run to the phone,
dial your number, but you're not home.*

*As I hang up, crazy thoughts run through my mind,
knowing all along I can't control what's behind.*

*Still saying to myself that you're all mine,
I go back to my cell, wanting to tell,
how you got my mind going through hell.*

*But in reality, it's my hell that put me here
and I have to take the heat, until we can meet
so I don't repeat, what I did in the streets.
So now when I call you on the phone, and you're
not home, I don't moan or groan.
I just hang up the phone, and not let it be known,
that I feel so all alone.....inside.*

Some men find it easier to forget about the world out there altogether. They cut off contact. They do their time in State greens and State sneakers, use State money at the commissary, expect no package, no letter, no visit. But it's hard to forget in Sing Sing. The old prison is so close to New York City, where most of the men come from; it lies in the shadow of the sun. And right over that wall are houses, cars, postmen, school buses, an old man walking herky-jerky, a kid sitting, scowling, on porch stairs. "Within a stone's throw," Freddie says. His cell is on the top tier, and he can see it all from the window.

"It feels like you're trying to walk and something's holding you back. You're looking at that's on the other side of that wall—can't touch it. That wall..." Freddie says, and stops and takes a breath. Kids would climb it, but full-grown men, stronger, smarter, are kept down as their years fly by. Calendar pages, that's what Freddie sees at night, pages ripped off one after the other. "That wall is strong. That wall is strong," he says softly. "That wall is... *phew*. Man."

Enrique sends me an example of a "talking letter," which the guys sometimes use to introduce themselves to women they're trying to pull: "Wow, it certainly feels good to get out of that cramped, dark, and cold envelope. Boy, am I tired....Hello, Kathy, I'm a talking letter....I hope that by now, your curiosity is fully piqued, and you're curious enough to read on. My, you have such soft hands and a real pretty smile. No, please don't crumple me up and put me back in that envelope.... Enrique only brought me out because he's lonely and in need of a pen pal. I'm sure you've noticed that by my packaging, I've come from a correctional facility. It sure feels good to be free. But I can't say that for the writer of this letter...."

Not only does the talking letter charm its way past a woman's anxiety, it allows the prisoner to be something small and scared ("Don't put me back in the envelope! It's dark in there!"), and to imagine escaping confinement and being held. Enrique's talking letter is signed with a smiley face, the signature of many a convict.

Freddie sends me a scented letter with a drawing on the envelope: Mickey Mouse standing in a blaze of sunshine, smiling dopily. He writes, "You have to experience it to know it (smile) and write about it." The scent of Muslim oil gives his letter a weight, an almost bodily presence. It slowly perfumes the air in my room. It gets in my hair, my clothes.... Freddie everywhere.

The ghosts are fighting to become flesh.

Jody* is the enemy. "Jody's with your woman now," the prisoners taunt each other. Years ago, Jody was called TOG for "the other guy." Though someone like George Warwick would just say "the faggot that's with my wife now."

According to Aush Byla, George became a kind of hero to guys inside the city jails for his poems about his wife who left him for another man shortly after he was arrested. When I meet him in Attica, George comes off like the most regular of guys, a kind of Everyman with his wife, his kids, his union card, his work ethic, his Saturday night out with the boys, hers with the girls. He spent his twenties in prison and met his wife, Elizabeth, shortly after he was released in '86. They got married and had a daughter, whom he named Lindsey Anne so her initials would spell L.A.W. George supported his family by working as a building super and with his "extra-uhh-curricular activities." He attended John Jay College nights. "I had 85 credits toward my bachelor's in criminal justice. So maybe this is like working toward my doctorate," he grins. Well, maybe George isn't Everyman, but he's every man who's been left by his woman when he got locked up.

It's easy to leave a prisoner—just stop writing, put a block on your phone, and he's gone. A lot of men don't tell their women what kind of time they got because they don't want her to give up on them. They'll tell her they got two to four. When two years roll by, they'll say they got in some trouble, got hit at the board. Two more years.... Freddie hasn't told the woman he's in love with. George hasn't told his wife, but for different reasons. She thinks he got something like 75 years. He wants to surprise her.

In spite of their efforts, a lot of guys get left, and George is their poet laureate. He wasn't writing valentines to his wife. He says they're "antliewe poems," but of course they're not. They love her furiously.

WHY, WHERE, WHEN??

*Never knowing
Why?*

*Not caring
When?
Sitting alone
Myself
Will I ever
Love again?*

*I should hate you
Bitch
But I
Don't
It puzzles me
More
Than I can
Say
The loneliness is
Here
It seems
To stay.*

*I gave you my
All
And you walked
Away
No love, no comfort
No family
You've taken, I've paid
All alone now
Love's gone
Why? Where? When?
Away!!*

"My brother read the last one. He goes, 'I think you're not over that bitch yet,'" George says. "I think it was written during one of my soft periods." This is how George sees his betrayal: He supported her with his illegal activities, but when he was jailed for them—let's say, laid off from his job—she left. In other words, she was there until the going got rough.

"So, should I forgive Elizabeth?" he asks me. "That's the question that haunts me." The problem is, if he forgives her, won't he lose her forever? Doesn't hate hold her close? "Sometimes the anger helps keep you alive in here," he says. "Sometimes I focus on the anger because there's nothing else to focus on."

All of the guys tell me about prisoners who spend their time planning what they're gonna do to that bitch when they get out. The lack of meaning, the harshness, the sheer boredom of a prison bid can drive the guys into religion or into a love or hate as strong as faith. George, for one, knows the deal—forgiveness might mean losing her, but to not forgive might mean losing his soul. "This is what worries me—by the time I get out of here, it'll be too late for forgiveness. You understand? I'll have no compassion left in my makeup, and all I'm looking for is vengeance. That scares me."

The letters are coming fast and furious. Whenever I open Enrique's, his cologne, Hugo Boss, scents my fingertips. In February, Freddie sends a big, glossy valentine, designed by another prisoner: "John L. Murray, Creative Blackness Inc." Outside it reads, THINK ABOUT THE TIMES YOU DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT ANYTHING...AT ALL. THAT'S WHEN I WOULD WISH...I WERE YOUR BATHWATER. Inside, in typed script: "If I were your bathwater...I would send parts of me together in the recesses of your navel. Where my temperature would rise to match yours. And like the seaweed of the sea, I would move your hairs between your thighs playfully."

Freddie and I find out that we both listen to the love phones on Z-100. He says he thinks of me listening in Brooklyn as he listens in Sing Sing, and so, of course, I start thinking the same thing. When I want to be alone, I have to turn the radio off.

I talk to a woman who's corresponding with a guy. She just got a poem—she's framing it, it's so beautiful. "But when they get out here, you know they don't have a romantic bone in their body," she says. She's saving every single one of his letters and when he gets out, first time he acts like a dog, she's gonna wave them in his face. "See these? Remember all the promises you made?"

Enrique's sex poem arrives in the mail like a slap—a slap from an invisible man: "...Come on over, you sweet

little thing / Drop to your knees and blow me good / Swallow my come saying 'yum-yum' / Get on all fours, I shall open that back door / Fucking that ass so nice and tight / I'll dig that back out all night..." He'd gotten shy and shy about sending it until I was practically begging him for it. Made me want to write him back: "Look, baby, you want to talk about sex? And then hit him with something as crude and aggressive as his poem. Like he'd challenged me to a fight. Ghosts: 2. Prison: 0."

Whenever I ask the men what makes a good love letter, they say, "You got to keep it real." But when I ask them what women want to hear, they say, "Promises." As one prisoner explains, "You're telling them, 'Listen, I'll come home and what you're giving me, you'll get back.' And once you come out, if you go against that, they know, 'Listen, the nigga go back to jail?' He ain't getting nothing."

There are the promises they make to keep people hoping; bad little boy promises to be good; so many promises, they can't possibly keep them all. Then there are the promises they want to keep as badly as anyone else wants them to: to stay off the needle or the pipe; to never, ever come back here again. As Enrique says, "I wouldn't want to be old like I seen a lot of guys and still be in prison. You know, you want to wake up in the morning and roll over and look at that and go, 'Mmmm...I got an hour before work.'"

The guards all talk about the revolving door, how they see the same faces returning again and again. They believe these men are fakes, slick as rain. But for every fake inside, there's something more frigh-tening—a failure, a fuck-up, a "sinner" as George puts it with a grin. And no matter how many times they fall, these sinners, these believers get back up again, their faith intact: *This time I'll get it right.*

In "Change," Enrique writes, "...Emerging from my cocoon of misery / As does the newly winged butterfly, / I find the change is difficult and unwieldy / And the wings are not yet dry. / One day in the future I'll fly past the mirror / The feeling will be warm inside. / No longer helplessness, misery or pain / For I will no longer have to hide."

He once told me that most of the guys don't know how to pull a woman when they're outside. So I asked, "Does the pulling ever end?" He laughed. "It ends when I find the one I'm connected with," he said. "You're supposed to pull a woman, and she's supposed to be the foundation to change your life." Women, then, are the route to redemption, and the love poem is a prayer, a votive candle. Or maybe women are the shortcut to redemption. Find the right one and somehow—poof—you will be a better man with a better life. Not surprisingly, this belief leads to a lot of bitterness on both sides. Women get tired of being used, of doing all the work. Men get tired of being disappointed. "Sugar turns to shit," is the way Freddie describes love relationships.

"Of course they like talking to you. They're locked up," one of the men's girlfriends says to me. "They don't have anyone else to talk to." So what? Was all I could think of saying, so I said nothing. They fight against their invisibility and isolation—shooting out those letters, those scented love poems, chasing lines over that unreachable wall—and that moves me. I don't know what I like more about them—their persistence, their sly humor, their sexual energy? No free man flirts the way a prisoner does. No free man has to. But it's their optimism, finally, that astounds me.

In the four months that Freddie's been in Sing Sing, two men have "hung up," as the prisoners call it. One they were able to cut down before he died, the other guy hung up in the box and so no one saw. George's wife has moved on with her life, and with his daughter. She writes him in Attica, "I hope the years are kind to you." Put their humor, their flirtations against that background. They're either stone-cold egomaniacs or they've got a lot of heart.

Or maybe it's both. But look at their arrogance—the way it flowers in cages, struts and boasts under that dry, blue gaze. "I can't trust a woman now," George tells me one day when he's taking account of his losses. "So I'll be alone. So what? I'm going after the money." His year on the street added up to zero—he lost his job, his home, his family. What was the point? He and I talk along that sad, bitter line for a while until George says (the grin starts in his eyes). "Maybe I'll just find another 20-year-old and start over. Maybe I'll switch from brunettes. Try blonds, redheads..."

Some guys just don't know when to quit. □

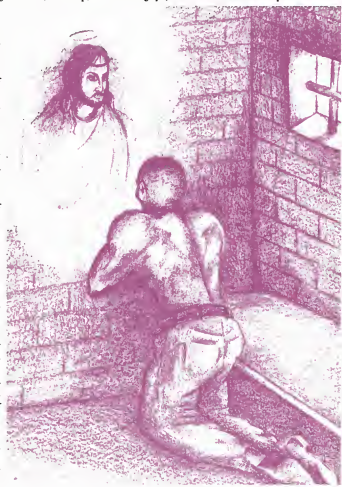


ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY CHANDLER

Everything in Frankie Knuckles's world is in sharp contrast. While he swears his needs are minimal—a wide-screen TV and a worn red leather sofa—the subtle placement of luxurious trinkets throughout his apartment belies the distinguished DJ's lifestyle in New York's grungy East Village.

"Now, don't even try to come for me...some of these things were gifts," he says as a guilty giggle shakes his bearlike frame. This playful image is miles away from the unflappable sonic persona represented on the composer/producer's second album, *Welcome to the Real World*.

The truth is that many of the baubles in Frankie's house—delicate ornaments from as far away as Japan—reflect the flair for quiet grandeur that's been a key to his career. In 1977 the New York arts student took flight to Chicago, hoping to hone the DJ skills he'd developed under the guidance of the late Larry Levan at the legendary Paradise Garage. In the Windy City, Frankie became one of the original architects of the house music sound. Ten years later, he returned to New York, where he did production for Michael Jackson and Diana Ross, and eventually sparked three No. 1 dance hits. Today he proudly carries the mantle of Clubland's undisputed godfather.

And while Knuckles isn't willing to own up to the opulence afforded someone of his stature, he finally seems ready to accept the creative challenges of blowing up while maintaining his underground integrity. Ample proof of his successful transition is provided on the new single, "Too Many Fish," which features the aptly named Adeva riding a funk-fueled hip hop groove that flows smoothly alongside Knuckles's lush house melodrama. "It's always a little scary to move into new territory," he says. "But my gut told me that it was time to reinvent myself." With that confession, Knuckles springs from the sofa into his kitchenette to give a simmering skillet of pasta, chicken, and fresh veggies a final stir. Spooing up plates of his healthful concoction, he wipes the sweat from his brow and grins. "I'm choosing to focus on the fact that this album is a real reflection of where I am at this time." Then, looking at his plate, he laughs. "But maybe next time, I'll fry up some chicken instead."

Larry Flick

CRIB

FRANKIE KNUCKLES

House music architect



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Competing in her first pro tournament last October, a playful and powerful 14-year-old Venus made it to the second round.

Swinging kid

Can 15-year-old
Venus Williams
give pro tennis the flava
it desperately needs?

By Mimi Valdés



It's mid-February in Delray Beach, Fla., and Venus Ebonistarr Williams, tennis's great black hope, is in the midst of a typically vigorous workout. Wearing a Stone Temple Pilots T-shirt and white beads in her braided hair, the six-foot-one Venus works on her forehand with her dad, Richard. She's smacking the ball with such velocity, it's easy to forget she's just a teenager. That is, until her attention starts to wander.

"Getting kind of bored, Venus?" says her dad.

"Yes, Daddy," she answers, *sounding* bored. As soon as Venus hears, "Okay, why don't you take a break?" she happily runs off to play with her dog, Queen.

It's not exactly the sort of high-pressure practice you'd expect for a girl on whom tennis freaks have had their eyes since she was 10 years old. If tennis wants to compete with the fan-tastic NBA, especially with the return of his Ainess, it needs some personality. Compton native Venus, with only one professional tournament on her résumé, just might be the one to throw some much needed flavor into the sport. And Venus's background makes her all the more interesting. When was the last time you saw kids in the ghetto walking around with rackets or arguing over who got next on the tennis court?

From the time she was eight, Venus's aggressive skills helped her win mad trophies. But as her notoriety grew, the sport was under increasing public pressure to keep teenagers from entering the professional ranks. Jennifer Capriati's cheap-motel drug binge is the worst-case scenario of what can happen when a young player is pushed too far, too soon. Capriati's father had her doing sit-ups as a baby and swung \$6 million in endorsement deals by the time she was 15. The pressure to play—and play fabulously—got too hectic.

In January 1995, a new rule was implemented to limit the number of tournaments girl pros can play. But last October, Venus announced she would turn pro—against her father's wishes—three months before the new restriction took effect. Having squeezed past the deadline, she now has a chance to become the last adolescent tennis superstar.

She enters the professional ranks after largely avoiding the junior circuit for four years, but her coach, Rick Macci, says she has maintained "Michael Jordan-like skills" and he believes she can change the way the game is played. This, mind you, from the man who coached Capriati.

The Williams family, meanwhile, is trying extra hard to ensure that their daughter does not crash and burn. Do not confuse Mr. Williams with those typical overzealous sports fathers: If Venus doesn't feel like playing, no one forces her. "His approach is serious, but he's a very gentle man," Macci says. "Venus has improved tremendously over the last couple of years, so her father certainly has not hurt her training."

Having learned the sport from books and instructional videos, Richard Williams trained local kids in their Compton neighborhood in the early 1980s. The courts were cracked and rarely used; drive-by shootings were a very

After Venus's first-ever tennis drill, at age four and a half, her father returned home to tell his wife, "We have a champion!"

real threat. When Venus was just four and a half years old, Williams brought 550 tennis balls to the court in a shopping cart and asked her to hit. Facing the same drill, most other kids had given up before the cart was half empty, but little Venus was another story. "She missed a lot of them, and some rolled like bowling balls," he recalls, "but the ones that went over the net flew like baseballs." After they were done, Venus rolled on the ground and laughed. Mr. Williams returned home to tell his wife, "We have a champion!"

As she showed and proved, moving up in the rankings, Venus's hype reached Maci in Florida. He often gets calls from parents claiming to have "the next Capriati," but Venus was the first kid he called on, visiting Compton in May 1991. "During the first hour, I didn't pinch myself or anything, but when she got to a competitive drill, her stock went through the roof," he says. But when Venus put her tennis racket down, Maci was sold. "She walked out of the gate on her hands," he says, laughing. "Then started doing cartwheels, and then backward somersaults. I'm sitting there going, I want to catch this girl!" In September of that year, the Williamses decided Maci was the man for the job and moved the family to Delray Beach, Fla.

Despite his family's sacrifices, though, Williams doesn't approve of Venus's decision to turn professional. He's been widely quoted as saying the next parent to allow their 14-year-old to turn pro should be shot. "Still feel the same way," he says with a grin. "I just don't want to be shot." Venus may have pushed for the pros, but the Williams family refuses to let her rush in. This May, her father announced that Venus would compete in just three pro tournaments this year: the Los Angeles Championships in August; and Toronto's Canadian Open and Oakland's Bank of the West Classic, both in October. "After discussing it with the family," says Williams, "we said okay, with the understanding that Venus would keep her grades up and continue doing her community work."

When she's not beating up on little yellow balls, Venus lectures about staying in school and away from drugs. So far she's visited the inner cities of 32 states for speaking engagements. "I'm always a little nervous, because I wonder if the kids are going to listen," says Venus. "But it seems like they do; they always ask questions afterward." As Jehovah's Witnesses, the Williams family believes it's their responsibility to serve the community. Mom and

Dad give support to 13 underprivileged children.

Mr. Williams has seen too many parents trying to live their dreams through their children. "If your child is a winner, everyone hates you," he says. "They say nasty things to you and your kids. I have been asked to fight seven or eight times. I've even seen parents beat their kids. It wasn't the kind of environment I wanted my daughters in. Besides, I couldn't take time away from my wife and other daughters to travel to those tournaments."

However, Carol Watson, a coach with the USTA Player Development Program, thinks there may be a downside to this restraint, that Venus's lack of junior experience might hurt her as a pro. "It's better to test yourself before something like a pro match," she says. "The pressure could be devastating. It's lonely at the top."

Every time Venus finishes a tennis drill, her dad says, "Thank you, Venus," to which she replies, "Thank you very much, Daddy." It's such a sweet exchange that you wonder if they're for real. Later, when Mama Williams arrives at the courts, Venus and her equally talented 13-year-old sister, Serena, toss their rackets and race to smother Mom with hugs and kisses. By the time Mr. Williams strolls over, the scene looks like one of those old family-oriented sitcoms—*Leave It to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*. It's family time, and nothing else matters.

"I want to play tennis for another 10 years, then become an archaeologist or maybe design clothes," says Venus. But what she's most interested in is supernatural phenomena. "I believe in the Loch Ness Monster, and things like Stonehenge and Easter Island," she says excitedly, "but I don't believe in UFOs or aliens."

And just because she was born in Compton, don't think she's on that gangsta tip—Venus prefers Nirvana or Green Day to hip hop and R&B. "I love the guitars," she gushes—also the mall, the movies, and Disney World. According to Serena, Venus sometimes teases her: "I'm a professional tennis player, I'm better than you." Venus is still very much a teenager—giggly, competitive, and nosy. In the middle of our interview, she asks if I'm spending the night in Florida. "Why?" I ask. "I was just wondering, because when you called my mom this morning, I was, you know, listening."

On the tennis court, though, the giggly teenager becomes a fierce competitor. "There comes a time when you've been training for something all your life and you want to show what you can do," Venus says. Last October 31, at the Bank of the West Classic, Venus did just that, winning her first professional match against Shaun Stafford in straight sets (6–3, 6–4). But after a jump for joy and frenzied autograph session at court-side, Venus had to face the world's No. 2 female player, Arantxa Sánchez Vicario, two days later. Although Venus didn't win that match, she took her star opponent to all three sets and showed the world she'd been ready for the pros.

Her performance had the sneaker companies (Reebok, Nike, Adidas, and Eli) who'd been sniffing around for years—sweet her even more. But on May 22, Reebok announced it had signed Venus to a reported multiyear, multimillion-dollar endorsement deal—including a signature clothing line for next spring.

"We've been working with the Williamses for about five years," says Dave Fogelson, director of public relations. (Reebok provided sneakers to distribute at Venus's lectures.) "And it was time to solidify our relationship. She's a positive role model who can become globally viewed as a top athlete—not merely a tennis player." Reebok insists it won't pressure Venus to play more. "For the next several years we're not concerned about her achieving any top ranking," says Fogelson.

"We chose Reebok because they've been running an

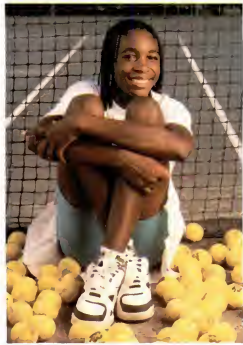
Urban Youth Tennis Academy for years and are supportive of Venus's community work," says Richard Williams. But even with the contract, Venus's father says education is a top priority.

After journalists began ambushing Venus after school, she had to transfer three times before her family opted for private tutors. "Once she completes her investment class, her tax class, and her math class," says Mr. Williams, "it doesn't matter what she does. If Venus continues to play, something can always go wrong as far as her getting hurt. But as long as she has knowledge, she'll always be successful."

Back at practice, Venus gets her dirty Reeboks even grungier. She's missing a lot of shots—for her—but instead of giving up, she just whines in disappointment and keeps swinging. Maci stands close by, offering encouragement: "Kick it like that." "Good rhythm." "Get a little crazy!" At the last comment, her father laughs and yells, "Hey, she's already crazy enough!"

Venus is developing a game that combines the best of Pete Sampras and Monica Seles. "I like Sampras's serve and volley and the way Seles attacks," she says. Some may consider Venus's constant rush to the net amateurish, but if she can perfect her aggressive technique, other players will have no choice but to change their style. "She can absolutely be better than anybody," says Watson. "The sky's the limit for her."

Although the Capriati comparisons are inevitable, Venus's tennis experience will no doubt be different. The color of her skin carries the burden that Venus must share with the few blacks who've become tennis stars. Despite the successes of Althea Gibson, Arthur Ashe, Yannick Noah, Lon McNeil, Zina Garrison Jackson, and Mali'Ve Washington, black fans are still looking for an icon to dominate the sport and bring some color to a blank canvas. To be blunt, the whole sport could use a boost. Interest in tennis has fallen off since the days when John McEnroe, Jimmy Connors, and Billie Jean King would get down for the crown. With her booming serve, her all-court game, and her irresistible charm, Venus may well change tennis as we now know it. The question now is—will she represent? ☐



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Edwardian coat by
Matsuda; white shirt
with cuffs \$220 by
Dolce & Gabbana;
black jeans \$45 by CK
Denim; black lace-up
shoes by Giorgio
Armani; silver beads
by Beads of Paradise

VIBEfashion

urb



an warriors

"Sacred bonds between blacks and Native Americans, bonds of blood and metaphysical kinship, cannot be demonstrated solely by factual evidence confirming extensive interaction and intermingling—they are also matters of the heart." —bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*

Photographs by Norman Watson
Styling by Derick Procope

Striped collarless
shirt \$360 by Dolce &
Gabbana; black wool
topcoat \$660 by
Katharine Hamnett;
black vest \$500 by
Giorgio Armani; silver
necklace and silver ring,
both by Jill Platner



White shirt \$185 by
Paul Smith; black vest
\$225 by Emporio Armani
and trouser from a suit
by Giorgio Armani;
silver armbands by Jill
Platner. Cream polo
shirt and woven knit
cap, both by Jean Paul
Gaultier; vest \$500 and
trouser from a suit, both
by Giorgio Armani

Striped shirt \$830 by
Comme des Garçons;
brown vest and herring-
bone trousers from a suit
\$1,215 by Dolce &
Gabbana; egypt by
Giorgio Armani; beads
by Beads of Paradise



Cream fur-collared
sweater by Jean Paul
Gaultier; black satin
vest \$490 by Matsuda;
wool trouser \$275
by Comme des Garçons;
bracelets by Jill Platner





Black woolen suit
and wool knit cap by
Jean Paul Gaultier

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TECH



WALÈ

Walè—rhymes with “ballet”—wasn’t discovered; he literally willed himself in front of the cameras. After modeling agents in London rejected him for being too black, too strong, the Nigerian native moved to Italy to blow up. He has since given good face (see his Ray Ban ads) and served hard body (peep *En Vogue*’s “Giving Him Something He Can Feel” video). Now he’s flexing his boundless charisma on the big screen in Congo—Michael Crichton’s fantasy-adventure—and on Fox’s *New York Undercover*, and he will be playing opposite Jim Carrey in *Ace Ventura II: When Nature Calls*.

“Going from modeling to acting is like going from the frying pan into the fire,” says the 27-year-old, who’s accustomed to working under pressure. Before chasing his creative pursuits, Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje studied law at King’s College at the University of London. He feels his degree has given him a leg up on the competition. “The folly and the downfall of every model I’ve seen is that they just don’t have any business sense whatsoever.”

Armed with legal savvy and the ability to transform himself, Adewale (which means “tradition has arrived” in Yoruba) is looking forward to achieving his next goal as a singer. “That’s really the pulse of my spirit,” he admits. “That’s what I’m driving toward, but I have to be in a position where I’m comfortable financially to do what the hell I like. That’s the kind of creative freedom I need.” And when he gets it, Walè will have truly arrived.

Ben Mapp



shoot trisha covington

Text and photos by Lisa Leone

Frank Gatson won the MTV Video Award for Best Choreography three years in a row, but today he's on a set in L.A. directing his first music video: Trisha Covington's "Slow Down," featuring supermodel Tyson Beckford. Gatson says he was inspired by the February 1995 cover of *Essence*, which featured Tyson in a sweet embrace with a sista.

So Trisha stands on a platform while Tyson hugs and kisses her. She gets embarrassed and starts laughing. Gatson shouts, "You're ruining the shot." Trisha says, "But we're in public!" Gatson later explains that "the video is about wanting to give it up, but slow it down. Sexual things happen that are hot and steamy, but nothing happens but foreplay."

Frank has made a living creating moves with such divas as Vanessa Williams and En Vogue. In fact, Terry Ellis is on the set giving Trisha some tips. In the beginning, Trisha has some trouble with the dance steps. Frank rushes up onstage to go through the moves with her. "Keep your chin up so the light bathes your face," he instructs. "Have sex with the camera! Play with your hair like a white girl!"

In the following setup, Trisha looks like a sexy, confident songstress. As she actually sings (unlike most artists, who are content to lip-synch in their videos), her face falls in and out of the light. Tyson sits behind her giving lustful glances. At the end of the shoot, Gatson gives Trisha a few words of wisdom. "You want to be a star, you've got to sell your soul." Or at least look like you did.



design tony whitfield

It began as a series of recurring dreams for Brooklyn furniture designer Tony Whitfield. He'd find himself in the red wing of a mansion that contained lots of hidden chambers and elegant furniture. Rather than sleep on his own nocturnal visions, he started his own company, aptly named—what else?—Red Wing & Chambers Inc.

Whitfield's style is eclectic, something he says is inherent to the black experience. For his "functional and culturally diverse pieces," he draws on influences as varied as African and Bauhaus design. A mirrored table, for example, is adorned with sandblasted patterns derived from West African tribal necklaces; it also flips and doubles as a full-length, standing mirror. "Most white architects and designers are simply concerned with European tradition," says Whitfield, who has designed furniture for Wesley Snipes's homes on both coasts. "Black people are extremely lucky because we've been forced to look seriously at a lot of different influences."

Julia Chance

ten years later the fat boys

Do you remember the Disco Three? No? Well, you may know them as the Fat Boys. The group (Prince Markie Dee, Kool Rock-ski, and Buffy the Human Beat Box) ate their way into the hip hop hall of fame as the first comedy rap group with hits like "All You Can Eat" and the crossover joint "Wipeout," and appearances

in the movies *Krush Groove* and *Disorderlies*.

That was 10 years ago. Since then Dee has recorded a solo album for Columbia and owns a production company, Soul Convention. Kool Rock also went solo with his own Rock for Us Records.

And Buffy has his hands in the production game,

bangin' out the ill joints for some of Kool Rock's

album. Like they sang back

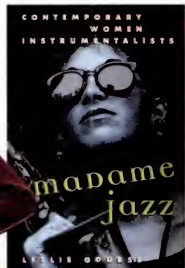
in 1985, the Fat Boys are

back. *The Blackspot*



gear ghetto golf

Fore! That means "watch out" in golf terms. Especially this summer, 'cause the latest street chic is golf gear. Clothing by Blast, Tommy Hilfiger, Guess?, Klurk, Polo, and Pivot Rules will help you go for the green all summer.



word 'madame jazz'

Leslie Gourse gives a crash course on the bittersweet legacy of female jazz musicians in the informative *Madame Jazz: Contemporary Women Instrumentalists* (Oxford). The 260-plus-page book isn't meant to be a complete history but an impressionistic glimpse of some of jazz's finest players, regardless of gender—pioneers such as trombonist Melba Liston, drummer/composer Cindy Blackman, and the acclaimed all-woman big band Diva. *Madame Jazz* (the title is derived from the character Madame Zaji in the Duke Ellington suite "A Drum Is a Woman") chronicles the challenges that these women overcame to take their rightful place at the top of their field. *Joseph V. Tirella*

LOOK

phoner **keith murray** calls the psychic friends network

By Mimi Valdes

PFN: Hi. Welcome to the Psychic Friends Network. This is Sandra 6263. Who am I speaking with?

KM: Yo, Sandra, you're speaking to Keith Murray, the most beautifullest thing in the world.

PFN: What kind of questions do you have?

KM: I'm a recording artist. So I need to find out what I gotta do to make my record sales go up.

PFN: What's your last recording?

KM: An album called *The Most Beautifullest Thing in This World*. I'm trying to go certified gold, but I need some help. You gotta let me know what's behind that door!!!

PFN: You're going in a good direction, but you wanna make sure that you don't hit a plateau where all of a sudden you start going down instead of up....

KM: Right.

PFN: ...and I think you're gonna have to be careful of some of the people around you....

KM: Right.

PFN: ...and I think you need to eliminate drugs and alcohol....

KM: Right.

PFN: ...I think you need to eliminate some ladies....

KM: Right!

PFN: ...and I think you need to become a little bit more religious or spiritually oriented.

KM: Yeah. [Keith's friends *Erick Sermon* and *Redman* in the background laugh and say, "Word up!"] You sound like a good adviser, but I'm asking you my future. That's all I wanna know!!! I want you to advise me like a doctor!!! I've got a psychiatrist!!!!

PFN: Really? Okay, well, I'll tell you what, Keith. We've been



on the phone long enough. I'm gonna let you go now, okay? Good night, darlin'.

KM: No, no, no, don't cut me off!

[She hangs up and then comes back.]

PFN: You're gonna have to hang up the phone!

KM: Why?

PFN: Because it's costing you \$3.99 a minute!

KM: Okay, let's talk!!!

PFN: I feel like I've said all I need to say.

KM: I feel cheated! I gotta come talk to your supervisor right now!

PFN: You go right ahead.

KM: I demand a supervisor!!!!

[Click]

KM: [Laughing] Oh shit! She straight hung up on the K! She would've rehabilitated my ass if she wouldn't have hung up.

tech **art in the dark**

Get with the computer program. Art in the Dark (Galerie 500; \$44.95) is a screen saver that replaces the flying toasters and swimming fish with paintings by noted African-American fine artists: Lois Mailou Jones, John Biggers, Paul Goodnight, and three other masters. The software presents "stress-relieving



FIGURES ON SPEECH: HERE BY ARTIST PAUL GOODNIGHT

image transitions" via up to 42 works, plus photos of the artists with bios, creating what

inventor/gallery owner Lawrence Harbin calls "a desktop museum collection." Right now, Art in the Dark ports to IBM PCs and compatibles with Windows 3.1 or better, and Macintosh is promised soon. So put some soul in your cyber. *Harry Allen*

comedian **chris tucker**

If you haven't heard a joke delivered in Chris Tucker's high-pitched rhythmic drawl, then you've used only part of your laugh muscle. "I don't try to speak that way," says the 22-year-old Atlanta native, "but when I'm hyper and on the mike, that's how it comes out." Tucker appeared on HBO's *Def Comedy Jam*, and used a 90-second stint in *House Party III* to start making movies. He's gone on to star opposite Ice Cube in the comedy-N-the-hood *Friday* and costar in the Hughes Brothers' black Vietnam-era drama, *Dead Presidents*. "It felt natural to play Skip," he says of his first dramatic role in *Presidents*, "because of the seriousness that's in my comedy. I was glad I got the part, because it will prove to directors I can go in any direction." *Omoronke Idowu*



DKNY

PUNWAY menswear fall '95

Photographs by Joe Major

Every year menswear becomes more and more progressive and daring—men are now getting almost as many clothing options as women. This fall,

designers took masculine chic to another level, showing soft colors, lush fabrics, and comfortable cuts. Who says men can't be as fashion-conscious as the females?

DKNY

Artifact

Tommy Hilfiger

Tommy Zung

Tommy Zung

stage roger guenveur smith

During *Inside the Creole Mafia*, the award-winning 1993 two-man show created and performed by Roger Guenveur Smith (rhymes with "hen fair") Smith (with Mark Broyard), the actor/writer's character confesses to centuries of sins, finally climaxing with voting for David Duke. The penance? One Our Father, two Hail Marys, and a lifetime of making a living "as a Hollywood actor who's too black to play white and too white to play black." Says Smith, "Whenever I've made that confession and received that penance, there's a shriek of recognition in the theater."

For the past 10 years, the Berkeley-born, L.A.-bred Yale School of Drama grad has largely created his own performance pieces. Though he has been featured as a college professor on *A Different World* and has written much of the dialogue for his most memorable film roles—like Smiley in Spike Lee's *Do the*

Right Thing and the "half wop, half nigga" in Lee's *Malcolm X*—Smith, who also appears in the film *Panther*, truly shines on the stage. His forte is merging his passions for acting and African-American history, which has resulted in a series of critically acclaimed works: *Frederick Douglass Now*, *Christopher Columbus 1992*, *Inside the Creole Mafia*, and the current *A Huey P. Newton Story*.

Smith uses Newton's own words to conjure up the late Black Panther Party founder, illuminating and breathing life into the Panther leader's mythic rise and fall. "Roger is the absolute embodiment of Huey," says David Hilliard, former Panther chief of staff. "It's like a séance. Huey and Roger are one spirit."

Elena Ommano



RAY MCNEIL

Tommy Zung

John Bartlett

Tommy Hilfiger

Tommy Hilfiger

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REVOLUTIONS

EDITED BY DANIEL SMITH
SPECIAL ED
REVELATIONS
Profile
GRAND PUBA
2000
Elektra
BY ELLIOTT WILSON

In hip hop, longevity is hard to earn. Every supa-rapper's biggest fear is "falling off." It's a youth-driven music, and so the heroes constantly change: Most rappers—from Big Daddy Kane to Public Enemy—tend to peak with their first or second album. And inactivity is the kryptonite that's paralyzed more than one MC's career. People like Rakim, the Jungle Brothers, and Digital Underground seem to be a bit frozen, intimidated by the idea of creating art for a new era.

Until now, Special Ed and Grand Puba could have been included on that list. →

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Special Ed and Grand Puba are masters of the flow—any MC's most important qualification.

Ed and Puba—two very different microphone stylists—are masters of the flow, any MC's most important qualification. Both are able to switch their styles at the drop of a dime and still remain on beat and on point. Both have mad skills. And this summer, both are making comebacks.

For eight years, New Rochelle, N.Y.'s Grand Puba has remained a rapper's rapper—one of the genre's most respected lyricists. Best known for his work with Brand Nubian, he left the trio due to rumored internal conflicts after the release of 1990's seminal *All for One*. On his 1992 solo mission, *Reel to Reel*, Puba combined his pro-black, nationalist stance with his patented girl-hopping tales. A mediocre effort, it left Nubian fans confused and disappointed.

The Brooklyn-bred Special Ed also has a classic to his credit: the 1988 single "I Got It Made," a club anthem that Shaquille O'Neal went so far as to cover on last year's *Shaq Fu—Da Return*. That song is from Ed's dynamic 1989 debut, *Youngest in Charge*, which was followed in 1990 by the all-but-forgotten *Legal*. Then Ed, like a genie (or like a guy with label conflicts), disappeared. Poof.

He reemerged in 1994 as a Crooklyn Dodger, hair in fat crowns, trading verses with Masta Ace and Black Moon's Buckshot on "Crooklyn Dodgers," from Spike Lee's *Crooklyn* soundtrack. The acclaim Special Ed received for his performance helped pave the way for *Revelations*, his first album in five years. *Revelations* is a slow burner. It's filled with the smoldering wrath of someone whose voice has been silent for too long. Gone is his GG image of the past. "I let my hair grow / 'Cause I'm wild," he growls over the hard jazz bop of "Won't Be Long."

Ed's renowned battle rhymes are still intact, this time laced with restless urgency. The chorus of the first single, "Neva Go Back," says it all: "I neva go back / I neva flow wack / I just come back / I just come phat." On cuts like the slow-rolling "Rough 2 the Endin'" and the frenzied "Here I Go Again," Ed makes a lot of references to hard times and to losing one's mind. It gets deep.

If Ed is stressed but ready, Puba, on his new 2000, is still playful and easy-going. This time around, what was left of his "conscious" agenda has been replaced—with the exception of the ineffective, Sam Cooke-inspired "Change Gonna Come"—by carefree, melodic material. At times Puba completely abandons his rhymes in an attempt to sing, slipping into brief interpolations of material ranging from the Stylistics to KC and the Sunshine Band. And Puba, like Ed, still rocks the pop culture punch lines. "I knew from jump that my shyt was gonna hit / Because I talked to Dionne Warwick / And she put me on some psychic shit," Puba quips on "Keep On." Later in the song, he boasts that his is "the greatest return since Jordan hit the court."

Both albums often manage to recapture the spirit of Ed's and Puba's earlier works, but the filler factor does come into play. In Ed's case, it's his forays into reggae that are just wrong. "Just a Killa" is an awkward collaboration with Bounty Killer, and "Crazy" is a musically clumsy tale of sucker MC bashing. Puba's "Very Special," and especially "Back Stabbers," try too hard to live up to the flavor of his 1992 Mary J. Blige duets, "What's the 411?" and "Check It Out." His collaboration with vocalist Michelle Valdes Valentin also seems forced, lacking the chemistry that made the "411" and "Check" such jeep hits.

L.L. Cool J shook up the rap world with his 1990 *Mama Said Knock You Out*, setting the standard for what a hip hop comeback is: a consistently mind-blowing piece of work in which an artist reinvents with flourish the persona he/she originally created. Special Ed's and Grand Puba's new albums hint at old moments of genius, but neither 2000 nor *Revelations* is cohesive enough to be considered comebacks in the Cool J sense of the term.

Yet both albums are dope, if not essential. Grand Puba Maxwell and Special Ed step up to the plate in 1995 with on-point rhymes, intense beats, and enough ferociousness and humor to remind us that their time is still now. 2000 and *Revelations* are two cool rides back to hip hop's future. Don't sleep.

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Your True Choice

Serving as the executive producer of, the music-oriented police drama, New York Undercover, producer of the chic urban flick *Strictly Business*, and Founder/President of Uptown, Harrell has positioned the company as a major player in multi media entertainment.

The next biggest vote (41) went to the late, legendary Anthony Hamilton. Anthony Hamilton, an immensely soulful singer, released his new year... Anthony's voice sounds like it's lived for 100 years. It's deep and rich in spirituality and soulful feeling. It's hard to imagine a man of 25 years possessing such a voice. His voice sounds like he's lived many lives. My job is mainly to surround it with the right kind of music to complement his voice. Then put together the most traditional elements to make it a whole thing clear to people. And that's what a soul is.

James Carter

Lastly, this month got to give some dad to guitarist **David Tom** for putting out his home-studio creation *Tripping Over God* (CMP). Tom pools concepts that Hendrix, Robby Frapp, and Brian Eno (among others) introduced into popular music long ago: controlled feedback, distortion, Middle Eastern melodicism, North African drumming and chanting—but he deploys these notions in ways that are intimate and mind-throttling. If James Carter is music for mad mackin', Tom is giving us musings for madcap meditation.

MELLOW

"A personal statement"



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XSCAPE
Off the Hook
So So Def Recordings

Like other girl groups of the past few years—En Vogue, Sista, Kut Klose—Atlanta quartet Xscape burst onto the music scene with sexual confidence, plenty of street attitude, and the services of a prolific male producer. With the help of hitmaker Jermaine Dupri (Kris Kross, Da Brat), Xscape's 1993 "Just Kickin' It" put a strain on the woofers of many a jeep-based speaker. And the rest of their debut, *Hummin' Comin' at 'Cha*, proved Dupri had a command of both trendy lingo and catchy hooks.

On their latest, *Off the Hook*, Tamika Scott, LaTocha Scott, Tameka Cottle, and Kandi Burruss have created the kind of seasoned sophomore effort that won both critical acclaim and commercial success for artists like TLC and Mary J. Blige. With the help of Dupri and longtime Babyface partner Daryl Simmons, as well as Organized Noize, the foursome have cut down on the faddish lyrics and created an album that's deeper than their first. While the sexual aggressiveness hasn't waned ("Just anticipating / If you and I were in the sack / But to me you look like / You wouldn't know how to act," they sing on "Can't Hang," which features a cameo from MC Lyte), love is clearly the main entrée.

The album is a tight 12 tracks—almost 89 minutes of music with no filler. Highlights include a passionate rendering of the Jones Girls' "Who Can I Run To," recorded live, and the grinding "Work Me Slow," which also appears on the *Bad Boys* soundtrack. Simmons brings Deele-like layered harmonies and tear-jerking melodies to "Do You Want To," in which Xscape croon convincingly about love and sex in the same relationship. "What Can I Do" jump-starts the tempo, using a line from Zapp's "Computer Love" and a snippet of Slick Rick's "Lick the Balls" to funky effect.

Around Atlanta way, "off the hook" is used to describe things so live they're beyond description. This album doesn't thump as much as *Hummin' Comin' at 'Cha*, but the slow grooves find a line and don't let go. With *Off the Hook*, Xscape prove they're way more than one-hit wonders.

Tonya Penelton



Po'
Broke
'N
Lonely

Forbidden Vibe
Big Beat

Po' Broke 'N Lonely do their best to push the sensual envelope, singing explicit ditties about oral sex and *ménages à quatre*. But when they sing stuff like "When you're wanting a good lickin' / Make sure your love is fresh as Minute Maid orange juice," on "Mr. Go Down," all you wanna say is "Wait a second, though—I ain't Minute Maid from concentrate?"

But beyond the sexual lyrics and the questions they provoke, there's precious little on *Forbidden Vibe* worthy of attention. Forgettable keyboard melodies and stagnant rhythm tracks support vocals that seldom reveal range or gripping emotion. The album doesn't even offer the quality moping songs you might expect from a group called Po' Broke 'N Lonely. Sadly, *Forbidden Vibe* should help this crew stay true to its name.

Chris Bonastia

'Tales From The Hood'

Soundtrack
Various Artists
40 Acres and a Mule
Musicworks/MCA

Mean 1 do their thing—sounding a little like Smif-N-Wessun minus the militancy. O' Dirty Bastard secures his cutting-edge status with "O' Dirty's Back," which begins with a child's voice talking in what boils down to incantations: "Brooklyn zoo / Brooklyn zoo / Dirty dirty dirty / Brooklyn." Meanwhile, with "One Less Nigga," MC Elit takes N.W.A.'s demonism to its logical conclusion: "So call me a devil / 'Cause I kill more niggas than the KKK.... This ain't the Malcolm and Martin days / 'Cause I'm a nigga on the mutha-fuckin' street / And I've got to get my rent paid / So I pop you and I drop you / And I figure to myself one less nigga." Genocide rhymes—my favorite.

The rest? Predictable variations on the natural-born-killer-from-the-'hood theme: blood, bullets, guts, and gats. After listening to, like, five tracks in a row—haunting gangsta whines, insane niggas gettin' they mob on—you realize that this "spooky" hip hop soundtrack is not only extremely forgettable, it's fucking silly.

Rob Marriot

I have a particular distaste for this kind of project: contrived, cooked-up soundtracks spawned from the greedy minds of corporate vampires. Not my cup of tea. Shit like this always sounds like a mix tape made by a publicity firm. The soundtrack for *Tales From The Hood* is yet another clunky attempt to unite East and West Coast aesthetics in the hopes of uniting East and West Coast sales. I'm all for hip hop multiculturalism, but this marketing shit has got to go.

Not that *Tales* doesn't have its moments. The Wu-Tang joint "Let Me at Them" is banging, and new heads NME & Grench the



Groove Theory

Groove Theory • Epic

Groove Theory, a duo consisting of vocal ballerina Amel Stowell and melody chemist (and ex-Mantronix member) Bryce Wilson, perform with a lovebird's sensibilities. On their self-titled debut, we're invited into Stowell's elegant, soft world of blessed optimism accompanied by Wilson's warm, fancy low-end.

Unfortunately, though, this effort never grabs you. "Come Home" goes for a poppy, "That's the Way Love Goes" sound, but Stowell's talent-show vocals sound out of place atop a track better suited for a Top 40 Muzak icon like Paula Abdul. "Tell Me," a joint about blissful devotion, borrows Keni Burke's "Keep Risin' to the Top" drumbeat and bass loop, creating yet another addition to the way-full library that houses the exoskeletons of remade hits. "10 Minute High" is a well-intentioned cut about a forgotten, crack-worshippin' sister, but it drowns in a Cheez-Whiz-y after-school-special-ness that '90s kool kids ain't tryin' to hear.

I'll say this about Groove Theory: Their musical partnership shines. Stowell's voice is, at times, very beautiful, and Wilson's music provides a mostly cool setting. They clearly have talent. But this debut, though promising, misses the mark. Hopefully, one day soon they'll produce what seems within their reach: a lovely, dark, intelligent mood symphony.

Sacha Jenkins

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BOOM SHOTS BY ROB KENNER



"Now the lyrics from my mouth is like a stream flowing down," chanted Burro Banton back in nineteen-eighty-sup'm. "It make you feel so happy, and iie as can be/ And when I think about Stereo Mars and the rub-a-dub it play for

me / The lyrics from my mouth is like a stream flowing down.... This is the old time religion."

Sound systems like Stereo Mars Hi Power were the solid foundation on which raggamuffin DJs built their lyrics, traveling from town to country to make a joyful noise and entertain the sufferers of Jamaica. "Anywhere the sound go," says Burro Banton, "you would be there. The sound was a part of you, and you were a part of the sound." In those days, Burro Banton used to shock out alongside living legends like Tenor Saw, Super Cat, Cocoa Tea, Nicodemus, Johnny Ringo, and Major Womies. As the first DJ to earn the name Banton—an honorific title denoting a lyrics champion—Burro has seen dancehall transformed from a ghetto celebration into a hit-driven music market. "It's not like when we used to go to dance," he recalls. "In those days, a DJ come to a session and talk on the mike for nine till 3."

Original Banton (Massive B) is Burro Banton's raw new album. Bobby Kondors's Brooklyn-based label has pumped out a steady stream of reggae and hip hop sure shots, earning maximum respect on the hardcore circuit. Burro's LP includes the signature jams "Boom Who Die" and "Washington Session" as well as 1995 hotshots like "Sensi Come From" and "Wanna Know." But the high point has to be "Bible Again," which features Burro speaking in tongues over a detrimental riddim known as the "Vampire." By the time he penetrates the 23rd Psalm, the lyrics from his mouth are like a stream flowing down.

Also keeping the original sound-system vibes alive is the internationally revered **Stone Love**. Founded by Winston Powell (a.k.a. Wee-Pow) some 20 years ago, Stone Love have risen from street corners and house parties to world tours and the award-winning Planet Pow label. Having challenged and defeated every major sound system on the father, Stone Love have retired from the soundclash business. The smooth-voiced selector Rory now uses his lethal collection of dubplate specials for peaceful purposes. "But if a sound disrespect," he cautions, "we will always defend ourself."

When most sound systems get dubplates, they pay a name-brand artist to sing a hit tune sprinkled with a few lines exalting their so-called "champion" sound. Stone Love dubplates are truly "specials," one-of-a-kind compositions by the likes of Buju, Wayne Wonder, Capleton, Sanchez, Louie Culture, and Beenie Man. Until recently, the only way to catch the Stone Love vibe was to visit Kingston's Skateland disco on a Thursday night or pick up a bootleg tape. But November Records' groundbreaking new album **Stone Love "Live"** promises to bring the true dancehall experience to a whole new audience. From the bugged-out 2001: A Space Odyssey intro to the dubplate barage that follows, this CD delivers a direct hit. There is talk about a Stone Love live documentary, and Rory hopes to star in a feature film on the life of a selector. "That would be the final goal," he says. "That, or go and spin on the space shuttle."

Burro Banton





Sexx Sells • Pendulum

An aural manifesto of urban carnal desires, Sexx's debut, *Sexx Sells*, is a wild songworld polluted with scattered clothes and used condoms. With a beat that swaggers like a nymphomaniac in heat, "You Bring the Freak" is mid-tempo sensual and will have folks dancing between the sheets.

This soulful trio tries to front like romantics ("Cause I know black girls need lovin' too," they sing on "Don't Be Shy"), but more aggressively sexy tracks like "Come Inside" and "Show Me Yours" prove they're mack daddies in sheep's clothing. But what this crew takes pains to make evident is that Sexx not only sells—it can sing too.

Michael A. Gonzales



Brown Sugar • EMI

This risky debut is puzzling. D'Angelo, a 21-year-old Virginia native, is determined to give pre-hip hop forms like blues, soul, gospel, and jazz a mid-'90s vibe. He sings about desire, reassurance, obsession, and clear-eyed joy in a whispery, totally confident falsetto.

Not interested in grabbing the spotlight in his mixes, D'Angelo inhabits his songs from odd angles, without non-stop Vandross-style aural showmanship. Even when he's singing a version of Smokey Robinson's "Cruisin'" rearranged with jazzy new harmonies and a kind of contemporary blankness, D'Angelo exhibits hip-hop—not traditional R&B—working habits.

D'Angelo is at his most dazzling, in fact, when he buries his old-school fantasies deepest. "Me and Those Dreamin' Eyes of Mine," a song that effortlessly transforms the experience of being captivated by a woman into a debate about reality, begins with sweet gospel colors and relies on a bracing wash of vocal harmonies. But it's the rhythmic flow—the quickness of the voices against the bass lines—that turn the piece into serious funk-soul.

The songs on *Brown Sugar* are most essential when D'Angelo roots them in form. It falls off, though, when D'Angelo doesn't have a song's form crystallized. "Brown Sugar" (clever) and "Shit, Damn, Motherfucker" (dramatic) ooze in over a kind of massaged blues, when more power would have come from totally embracing—or violating—the genre. Most of this important debut is a joy to listen to, but D'Angelo's gifts are almost too all-over-the-place. An artist this ambitious will probably want, in the future, to keep a closer reign on his many musical passions.

James Hunter



THE WALL GROUP/EMI

2 PAC

ME
AGAINST
THE
WORLD

MUSIC WITHOUT LIMITATIONS

FOR A WORLD WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS

A-R DIRECTION: TOM WHALLEY



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Sexsational • Giant

Three years ago, Tony Thompson was the lead singer of a group of teen dreams known as Hi-Five. As the candy rain fell from the sky in their hometown of Waco, Texas, Hi-Five splashed in the footsteps of the Jackson Five and New Edition: stylish teenage soul boys who'd spent their prepubescent years creating dance routines and lip-synching to the voices roaring from the stereo. When Hi-Five's ultracut first single, "I Like the Way (The Kissing Game)," went to the top of the pop

charts and became the anthem for brown-gal slumber parties, Tony Thompson became a *Right On!* magazine poster boy and a hot commodity.

With his first solo effort, *Sexsational*, 19-year-old Thompson attempts to prove that he's no longer a boy singing love songs in a man's world—that he can stand on the corner and bark with the big dawgs. And with writers and producers like Babyface, DeVante Swing, Sean "Puffy" Combs, Joe, and the Characters, Thompson—confidently maneuvering his fragile, DeBarge-like falsetto—is obviously trying to ascend to the highest-profile of street-pop planes. But *Sexsational* ends up being a decent album that should have been exceptional. Even with such a wide range of helpers, most of the tracks sound mighty similar.

But a few of the mid-tempo ballads still manage to move and groove. "I Wanna Love Like That," penned by Babyface, is hypnotic, as is "Handle Our Business." As produced by newcomers Jerome Jefferson and BLACKstreet's Dave Hollister, the song has a sensual conviction missing in most of the other tracks. Thompson also covers Stevie Wonder's 1969 classic "My Cherie Amour." It's a faithful interpretation of Wonder's text, but the Characters go buck wild with the textures and turn the song into a pyrotechnic display of joyful affection. "My Cherie," unlike most of the rest of Tony Thompson's just-okay debut, is positively vibrant.

Michael A. Gonzales

Jody Watley

Affection
Avitone/Bellmark

Jody Watley is not at her sassy, insightful best on her fifth solo album, *Affection*. Most of these 1980s-sounding tracks are strewn with clichés and coated with stale pseudo-hip hop beats. "The Way (Pts. 1&2)" is a fun tribute to bad relationships that survive on good "funking," and the title track's shout-out to gay folks is an original spark. But "The Beat Don't Stop" blandly urges us to "just keep movin'," while "All Night Love Affair" rehashes the familiar don't-move-so-fast-we've-got-all-night scenario. Sadly, Watley's kinda-creepy, lounge-lizardy remake of "Lookin' for a New Love," her classic kiss-off to wack lovers, bids good-bye to her finest moments.

Asali Solomon

MICHAEL WALLS





Isaac Hayes—the bridge between James Brown and Burt Bacharach—is still bald, still obsessed with the Academy Award-winning wah-wah guitar sound from his 1971 “Theme From Shaft,” and still as trailblazing as he was on classics like 1969’s *Hot Buttered Soul* and 1971’s *Black Moses*. His bass voice, though, has softened, and his messianic pretensions have been replaced by serious dedication to challenging the listener. Hayes waxes nostalgic, like many comeback artists, but he’s wise enough to stray off into moods previously unexplored.

Branded is a study in defying convention. Hayes opens the album with four songs (Sling’s “Fragile,” “Ike’s Plea,” and two versions of “Life’s Mood”) combined to produce a 13-minute-plus suite. His cover of the upbeat “Summer in the City” grieves, while his hopeful sonnet “Let Me Love You” eliminates drums and ends up with an otherworldly effect. And instead of pimp talk and thinly veiled misogyny, he smiles over the scowling R&B of “I’ll Do Anything (To Turn You On).”

An old-fashioned, falsetto-filled elegy, “Thanks to the Fool,” offers a lengthy stereologue over suitably melancholic keyboards, successfully evoking the Chi-Lites and the Delfonics. For the timeless “Soulsville,” Hayes laments that “Any kind of job is hard to find, that means an increase in the welfare line / The crime rate is rising too; if you were hungry, what would you do?” He delivers in two lines what rap groups can’t do in an album.

For *Raw & Refined*, Hayes sounds like he’s back in a Memphis soul club, churning out instrumentals and fusing unlikely forms. Some songs are effective (the electric rock of “Birth of Shaft”; the brooding sadness of “Didn’t Know Love Was So Good”), while others are less so but still strangely captivating. “Urban Nights” moves modern R&B past programmed sequences; “Funkalicious” sounds like reckless, optimistic, early Prince; “Tahoe Spring” belongs on a Neil Simon soundtrack; and “Soul Fiddle” is *Hee Haw* for keep-it-realers.

Charming, ambitious, and filled with more grooves than some producers can muster in a lifetime, *Branded* and *Raw & Refined* are both still somewhat frustrating. In addition to abandoning the chains, furs, and robes of his *Black Moses* era, Hayes should retire the wah-wah pedal and “Shaft” motifs. An accomplished songwriter and composer, he’s best when he’s exploring the darker, more refined themes that provide both albums’ most lasting moments.

Ronin Ro

ISAAC HAYES

ISAAC HAYES • Branded
ISAAC HAYES MOVEMENT • Raw & Refined
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NOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND BY MIMI VALDES

It sure ain't easy getting a record deal, but you'd think the champions of prestigious battles would be all right with their careers. Freestyler extraordinaire Supernatural, who won the 1993 New Music Seminar's MC Battle for World Supremacy, has yet to release his EastWest/EEG album. Last year's MC Battle winner, Chicago's Judge Mental, is still unsigned 'cause record labels think his lyrics are too complex.

And it's ironic that "Nat's runner-up, Mad Skilz (signed to Big Beat/Atlantic), will release a single before the guy who beat him.

Hailing from Richmond, Va., Skilz—who's developed since the days he

would only deliver one-liners—wins with "Nod Factor," produced by Psycho Les of the Beatnuts. The song earns its name with a ridiculously addictive track guaranteed to get kids amped. The B-side, "Skilz in '95," is produced by Large Professor and is just as dope.

Houston's unsigned K-Otik (for more info, call 713-664-4725) have made a name in their hometown by doing local underground radio shows and performances. One of K-Otik's standout songs, "Check the Verbal," is a cool-out track where they kick on-point lyrical flows over jazzy hip hop beats.

The Goodie MoB (The Good Die Mostly Over Bullshit) have ruled Atlanta's underground scene for quite some time. After appearing on OutKast's 1994 "Git Up, Git Out," they ended up getting a deal with LaFace Records. Their debut single, "Cell Therapy," is some southern ghetto shit that just might take a minute to get used to—it sounds like nothing else. With creepy music and a singing chorus that goes, "Who's that peeping in my window? / Pow! / Nobody now," the song reflects the group's

theories about government—and it offers up a Goodie MoB solution.

After pressing up 500 copies of "Unified Rebellion" and mailing them to select underground DJs, Los Angeles' Jurassic 5 got picked up by Blunt Recordings. Jurassic actually consist of two groups, Rebels of Rhythm and Unity Committee, who met in 1992 at L.A.'s infamous freestyle mecca, the Good Life. Both groups were unsigned, and because they admired each other's skills, they wanted to record a song together. The result is an old-school-sounding track with some scratching and a loop from Kraftwerk's "Trans-Europe Express," as well as some of the lyrics from the theme to *Different Strokes*, Run-D.M.C.'s "Here We Go," and Gang Starr's "I'm the Man." "Unified Rebellion" is nothing particularly new, but Jurassic 5 get props for capturing the bubblyness of early hip hop.



Mad Skilz

NOW PLAYING

VIBE-raters

Office favorites—in no particular order

OL' DIRTY BASTARD—

*Return to the 36 Chambers:
The Dirty Version*

TRICKY—

Maxinquaye

COMMON SENSE—

"Resurrection"

JIMI HENDRIX—

Band of Gypsies

VARIOUS ARTISTS—

Axiom Funk: Funkcronicomicon

MOBB DEEP—

The Infamous

BEENIE MAN—

"Memories"

PATSY CLINE—

Greatest Hits

DRINK ME—

Sleep

VARIOUS ARTISTS—

*Pump Ya Fist: Hip-Hop Inspired by
the Black Panthers*



REGINA KING'S *Top 10*

Current favorites—in no particular order

SOCIETY OF SOUL—

"Pushin' "

JAMIROQUAI—

Return of the Space Cowboy

SOUL FOR REAL—

Candy Rain

SCARFACE—

The Diary

MILES DAVIS—

Kind of Blue

CHANNEL LIVE—

"Mad Izm"

ISRAEL VIBRATION—

"Rude Boy Shuffle"

REDMAN—

Dare Iz a Darkside

STEPCHILD—

"Stepchild"

INCOGNITO—

Positivity

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jimi
hendrix

Voodoo Soup
MCA



Sun. Twenty-five years later, we have *Voodoo Soup* to feast on.

The title is silly but apt, since this album is a delicious soup of sorts, a bouillabaisse of musical flavors. Although most of the ingredients come from *The Cry of Love*, *War Heroes*, and *Rainbow Bridge*—mediocre (bad song selections, poor production) early '70s posthumous collections—*Voodoo Soup* gathers some of the best of Hendrix's last recorded music. The ethereal dreamscapes of "Angel" and the street-fighting militancy of "Freedom" and "In From the Storm" are as intense and diverse as anything Hendrix released in his lifetime.

And diversity is one flavor *Voodoo Soup* has in abundance, considering it was recorded with two different bands—the psychedelic Experience and the soul brothers of Band of Gypsies—and sometimes a mixture of both. What the album lacks in continuity, however, it makes up for in passion, as found in the strong funk of "Message to Love" or the instrumental fury of "Peace in Mississippi."

But any post-1970 Hendrix release has an Achilles' heel. Producer Alan Douglas, who controls the Hendrix tape vaults, commits an unforgivable faux pas by having a studio hack overdub new drum parts on "Stepping Stone" and "Room Full of Mirrors" (repeating the inexcusable mistakes he made on 1975's *Crash Landing* and *Midnight Lightning*). Despite Douglas's latest shortsighted judgment call, though, *Voodoo Soup* is a rich addition to the Hendrix canon.

Joseph V. Tirella



**TERENCE
BLANCHARD**

Romantic Defiance
Columbia

To call Terence Blanchard's new *Romantic Defiance* a return to form might be stretching the case a bit, but the album, his sixth as leader, does signify the trumpeter's renewed interest in jazz as jazz rather than pop. Not only is this suite—in eight movements for quintet—a far cry from the wack orchestral backings that sullied Blanchard's 1994 Billie Holiday tribute; it also finds the horn man borrowing a riff or two from the rich vocabulary of New Orleans. Opening with a song called "The Premise" and closing with a "Morning After Celebration," *Romantic Defiance* is a sly, provocative program that suggests Blanchard has been contemplating the mo' betta blues again.

K. Leander Williams

MC BREED

Big Baller
WRAP/
Ichiban

There still ain't no future in frontin' on MC Breed, the funniest, steady-mobbingest MC in all the Great Lakes states. With that fly, bud-burned voice—like Tone-Lōc's meaner little brother—Breed comes hard on his fifth album, wrapping OG stories around old-school styles and representing "straight actual factual shit from Flint," Michigan's depressed former capital of the auto industry. Unlike G's on the West Coast, Breed can actually claim ancestral kinship to the mighty George Clinton (a sometime collaborator) and often does—laying out the lava-pit bass of the stankiest P-Funk, masquerading as Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk, and exhibiting a Clintonesque way with metaphor. As Breed says himself, "We hail from Michigan, but we roll like Michelin."

Chris Norris



the last poets

Holy Terror
Rykodisc

When I was doing my black militant thing back in college, the Last Poets provided the ammunition I needed to check "the Man" and any bro or sis I perceived as being "Negro." The '90s make me fend for underground classics like "Niggers Are Scared of Revolution" or "This Is Madness," especially now that herbs like Newt Gingrich are trippin'.

Thank the ancestors that the latest incarnation of the Last Poets—featuring founding member Abiodun Oyewole and Umar Bin Hassan (who joined a year or so after the crew's birth)—has produced *Holy Terror*. The album is a junkyard of sounds: Bootsie Collins's clunky guitar and bass, Bernie Worrell's spiraling keyboards, Aiyb Dieng's minimalist percussion, and Melle Mel's old-school flow, all bagged and knotted by producer Bill Laswell's magnetic ear for gritty black music. The result is a slammin' stew of funk, soul, R&B, and hip hop that will most definitely make you bow down to the godfathers of rap.

Oyewole's "If We Only Knew," a cry for black folks to pick our self-esteem up off the floor, is pure butter. So is Umar Bin Hassan's "Illusion of Self," a spiritual ride inside the America that America doesn't want to acknowledge. "Homesick" is another standout Hassan track, a nod to our African heritage and the choke hold that slavery still has on our psyches. Riding Hassan's spiritual back, and sounding like a rejuvenated warrior, Melle Mel sums up in one line what historians and sociologists take volumes to say: "From the African kings and queens / To a drug kinkin on the streets of Hollis, Queens."

Holy Terror works because it's painfully honest and its creators aren't trying to live on the fame plantation. If only more of our newborn poets were taking notes.

Kevin Powell

WHERE WILL THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G. BE ON AUG. 8



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1
Do you feel athletes who crossover into making record albums are doing it for the art or for the money?

Press 1 for ART - Press 2 for MONEY

2
Do you consider athletes to be role models?

Press 1 for YES - Press 2 for NO

3
Do you think athletes have an obligation to build the community?

Press 1 for YES - Press 2 for NO

May Poll Results: (1.) A strong 84% of you agree that the best of hip-hop is not recognized at awards shows. (2.) An 80% majority knows the only way to keep it real is for hip-hop to have its own awards show. 20% don't know what time it is. (3.) 75% of you recognize that hip-hop isn't all about rapping and feel there should be a separate category for track production.

SINGLEFILE

By James HUNTER

Whether plugging into the hypnotic flow, the specific yuks, or just very frank demonstrations of the idiom, hip hop folks crave old-time funk right now—new slices of the ol' stuff reworked with '90s mystery and conflict. East Coasters might not look to the theme-park-size bass lines and Troutman-esque talk box riffs of **RODNEY & JOE COOLEY's** "Funk in Yo' Face" (React/West Funk), but the duo's emphasis on classic funk grammar is pure, not merely nostalgic.... Staten Island's **KING JUST** rolls out "tribal" choruses that you have to strain to understand on "No Flow on the Rodeo" (Black Fist). But what anchors this striking single is bass that puts all its money on the one beat, even as snares and piano punctuate erratically throughout.... Where the **D&D PROJECT** featuring **II UNORTHODOX** pack minimalism into their trendily titled "Just a Little Flava" (Arista), **CHAMP MC** throws a party with "Funkhouse" (EastWest). The "Gigantic Funk Remix" pits big brass samples against screaming whistles.... **C&Z** offers his meditative

"Keep My Soul" (EastWest)—which lives off the line "Everybody want to go to heaven / But nobody want to die" in the "Heavenly Horn Remix"—while **THE COUP** amuse with the satirical "Fat Cats/Bigga Fish" (Wild Pitch/EMI). The ditty spins stories about catching buses and going to Burger King, as a female background singer urges folks to "Get down, get down.... And if AMG are happy to turn their "Around the World" (Select) into a rock-solid piece of '90s funk, **KID SENSATION's** soulful, poppier "Seatown Funk" (Ichiban) looses a laid-back synth line and some debonair summertime rhyming

above a trebly rhythm track that won't let go.... **C-FUNK's** great "Lime in Ya Coconut" (Scarface/Priority) adapts Nilsson's 1972 "Coconut" to their jazzy new purposes, sliding the lyric's always slippery meaning this way and that, effecting one of the best grooves of the year so far.... Why is the **HUMAN LEAGUE's** "Tell Me When" (EastWest)—a return to the ice that Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis melted with 1986's "Human"—succeeding madly in the clubs? Because it goes straight back to what people are now calling the Big '80s.... Meanwhile, **N-TYCE's** "Sure Ya Right" (Wild Pitch/EMI) is gleefully Big '90s. A piece of hard fluff produced by Father (formerly known as Father MC), boy-girl negotiations take place to the sound of go-go-ish stops and starts.... Producer Dallas Austin brings together 93 women—from **VANESSA**

WILLIAMS to **TLC** to **SWV** to **CRYSTAL WATERS**—for "Freedom" (Mercury), the first single from the **Panther** soundtrack. The song first appeared on Jol's *The Pendulum Vibe*, but Austin's new version disperses the energy that made the original (which he also produced) so galvanizing.... **INIKAMOZE's** "Listen Me Tic (Woyoi)" (EastWest) is neither a reprise of his "Here Comes the Hotstepper" smash, nor roots reggae, nor Sly and Robbie-style techno-stuff. This single has the sound of a seasoned Jamaican artist at home in adventurous surroundings. The aggressive, lone notes of the arrangement play off Kamozé's vocal warmth brilliantly. This is music dead set on getting your attention and, without any showing off, it does.



Champ MC



N-Tyce

PAULA ABDUL

Head Over Heels • Virgin



"Thoughts" and "Get Your Groove On" feel less like dance music than music for aerobics, and the ballads stop before they start. Paula still has the energy of a great performer, but musically, the time of the "Forever Your Girl" may just be up.

Josh Tyrangiel

'MY FAMILY'

Soundtrack
Various Artists
Elektra



The trouble with soundtrack albums is that if you haven't seen the movie, you may not know why you're listening to the music. You need those celluloid pictures in your head to appreciate why a dozen tracks with apparently no sensible relationship to one another have been herded onto the same plastic disc. Such is the case with the soundtrack to *My Family*. The film is a portrait of a Mexican-American family hanging together through immigration sweeps, gang warfare, jail terms, and last-minute weddings. The music from the movie sounds like a walk through an American neighborhood: a little doo-wop, a little funk, a little banda, and the sweet strains of an old-fashioned waltz—a collage of sounds you might hear through swinging doors and open windows on a Saturday afternoon.

There are a few memorable tracks here, but there are plenty of better compilations of mambo, ranchero, and rock en español elsewhere. The best cuts, though, stand on their own terms. You don't need to see Jimmy Smits pacing like a lean tiger down an East L.A. street to appreciate the tough demeanor of Los Lobos' "Down on the Riverbed." Mexican pop rock group Mana contribute a pretty calypso-tinged ballad, "Celoso," and *merengero* Juan Luis Guerra has written a great new tune, "Señorita," especially for the film.

But it's the memory of a funny Esai Morales scene that lifts a cut like Perez Prado's "Que Rico el Mambo" from okay to sublime, and it's the script that gives James and Bobby Purify's "I'm Your Puppet" a reason to be on this album. Think of the soundtrack to *My Family*, in fact, as a real family of songs—despite its gaps and fuzziness, it's still a poignant reminder of the breadth of *la raza*.

Chlori Santiago

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faith is in vain / 'Til Shiloh we'll chant Rastafari's name." Banton's duet with the late Garnet Silk on "Complaint" indirectly addresses the controversy surrounding Buju's homophobic 1988 single, "Boom Bye Bye." The acoustic guitar rendition of "Untold Stories" is reminiscent of Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" and confronts the issues of education and poverty in Jamaica: "When Mama spend her last to send you to class / Never you ever play."

"Hush Baby Hush"—set to a '60s ska groove—and a version of Maurice Williams' oldie "Stay" ("Close the door / Be sure it's locked / Bangarang in the room between you and me") are simply the bomb. Reality-based tracks like last year's hit "Murderer" demystify the lifestyle of gunmen: "Murderer blood is on your shoulders / Kill me today, you cannot kill me tomorrow."

Banton has grown a lot since his 1993 *Voice of Jamaica* debut. He's changed labels and the B-boy hairstyle has given way to dreadlocks, but his heavy-duty production team—Donovan Germain, Bobby Digital, Dave Kelly, and Sylvester Gordan—remains strong. 'Til Shiloh combines Buju's rough, gritty vocal style, conscious lyrics, and slammin' sound system quality, and shows that the longevity of reggae music is directly related to its ever-changing rhythm.

Debra Bass

Reggae artists have come full circle: from the conscious music of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and Jimmy Cliff in the '70s to the slackness vibe of dancehall in the '80s to now, when artists are dropping knowledge of a spiritual nature set to a dancehall rhythm. Buju Banton's sophomore effort, 'Til Shiloh, is a prime example of the most recent phase. Banton's social commentary reigns supreme on these 15 tracks, but themes of love and violence are also incorporated.

'Til Shiloh opens with the title track, a short a cappella verse praising Rastafarian culture: "I know you may think my

Buju Banton

'Til Shiloh
Loose Cannon/Island

TOSHI REAGON

The Rejected Stone
Pro-Momma

Brooklyn-based singer/songwriter/guitarist/producer Toshi Reagon has an unabashed penchant for '70s-style blues rock. The songwriting on her second solo album walks a fine line between anthemic and simplistic, but it hardly matters, because the daughter of Sweet Honey in the Rock's Bernice Reagon can sing lyrics as basic as "We can trust the sun to shine" with the fierce conviction of a gospel preacher on Judgment Day. If *The Rejected Stone*—or her exuberant live shows—are any indication, Toshi is due for a spot in the rock pantheon somewhere between Lenny Kravitz and the Indigo Girls.

Henry Hample



The Jon Spencer

Blues Explosion

Remixes Experimental • Matador



Jon Spencer and his tribe of nomads are the current keepers of the nerdy-hip indie rock cipher. Last year's critically acclaimed, all-balls-out *Orange* was a smut-peddling vending machine, fertile with sci-fi surfer blues. The songs on *Remixes Experimental* are reconstructed, hip-hop-esque versions of *Orange* originals.

The Beck-, Mike D-, and Mario Caldato Jr.-produced "Flavor Part 1" and "Flavor Part 2" spew Mothership landing sonics alongside crazed Biz Markie beat-box chatter, and the GZA-crafted "Greyhound Part 2" features second-generation Wu-Tanger Killah Priest. Killah glides through ostentatious verbals like "I saw Christ with a Mac 11/So I joined his army and prepared for Armageddon." It's out there, but it's in there.

Sacha Jenkins

LES SAGES POETES DE LA RUE



Qu'Est-Ce Qui Fait
Marcher les Sages
Jimmy Jay
Records/WMD

I'll stop frontin' now and tell you that the two years of high school French I took only aided me somewhat in my attempt to cross the language barrier and comprehend what these brothas are saying. But you don't always have to understand the words to feel. Some things you just know.

The first time I saw Les Sages Poetes de la Rue, they were opening a sold-out show for France's premier hip hopper, MC Solaar, at Le Zenith Theatre in Paris. The trio had a crowd of more than 6,000 men, women, and children of all persuasions following *le geste*—that is, throwing their hands in the air and wavin' 'em like they just didn't care. And this was before they even released their album. Dany Dan, Zoxex, and Pheelo wrecked shop with a flurry of maniacal French tongue twisters.

Hailing from Boulogne, a small suburb just outside Paris, Les Sages Poetes de la Rue (Wise Poets of the Streets) compare the place they come from to New York's Staten Island. Qu'Est-Ce Qui Fait Marcher les Sages, a collection of 14 full-length songs and three fat interludes, is a passionate, soulful representation of the group—three young black Africans living in a country that, much like the United States, is not set up to favor them. But it's not all bad. There are pretty girls to look at ("Les Filles Sont Belles"), the people are reasonable ("Le Peuple A Raison"), and Les Poetes have the musical and lyrical skills necessary to pay the bills ("Teknik Dans la Peau").

Entirely self-produced, under the executive supervision of Jimmy Jay (Solaar's DJ and producer), Les Sages Poetes have definitely got a little something going on. Probably the most amazing thing about this album is that it actually exists—it's yet another project confirming the power and influence of hip hop worldwide. It's kinda fly that kids overseas are carrying on the U.S. oral tradition—and with much class.

Traci McGregory

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BUSHWICK BILL

Phantom of the Rapra
Nôo Trybe/Rap-A-Lot/Virgin



Both with the Geto Boys and in his solo work, there's always been a method to Bushwick Bill's madness. Geto Boys tracks like "Mind of a Lunatic" and "Mind Playing Tricks on Me" and Bushwick's own fascination with horror movies (especially those featuring his eerie alter ego, Chuckie) implied a relationship between savage oppression, psychic disintegration, and the surreal violence of the inner city. If Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five warned "Don't push me 'cause I'm close to the edge" in "The Message," Bushwick and the Geto Boys showed what happens when the message is ignored, the push comes, and the edge is crossed.

That's not to say Bushwick and the Boys have always been above shamelessly sensationalizing those themes and allowing their once fresh impulses to congeal into formula. Which brings us to *Phantom of the Rapra*, Bushwick's first solo album since *Little Big Man* in 1992. Unsurprisingly, Bushwick's obsessions remain consistent: Size ain't shit ("Who's the Biggest"), you can't pull the hoes off him ("Ex-Girlfriend"), he's been shot and ain't afraid to die ("Already Dead"), everyone in power is corrupt ("Mr. President"), and the world is careening toward apocalypse ("Wha Cha Gonna Do?"). His identity tricks also continue: No longer content merely to merge into "Chuckwick," he is now "Dr. Wolfgang Von Bushwickin the Barbarian Mother-Funky Stay High Dollar Billestr."

The album's title, of course, extends the horror movie motif, while also exploiting Bushwick's newfound interest in the Western high-art canon: "On the cool, I'm into classical music and my favorite artist is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart," he says in the press release accompanying the album. Still a First Amendment poster boy, Bushwick has coined the term *rapra* to indict the hypocrisy of those who would censor rap, even though *opera* deals with many of the same taboo subjects and "rap is opera to people in the ghetto."

If *Phantom* doesn't break new ground, the advantage of its familiarity is that Bushwick knows how to work this turf. The fierce, hypnotic groove of "Wha Cha Gonna Do?" is impossible to resist, despite the song's quietism of "Wha cha gonna do when the world's on fire? / I'm a light a spill and keep gettin' higher"), and "Times Is Hard" and "Only God Knows" take fatalistic looks at life on the mean streets.

Far from the world's greatest rapper, Bushwick has gotten over on the force of his personality and his skill at self-invention. Those qualities ultimately carry him through on *Phantom of the Rapra*, but he needs to take more risks in the future if his work, as he would no doubt put it, is going to make sense as well as make dollars.

Anthony DeCurtis

20 Questions

1. Why is it that unless we find out that **Luther Vandross** is going to sing all the jams from *The Night I Fell in Love*, we're not going to care about his summer tour at all? 2. How come nobody's checking **Smif-N-Wessun** for opening "Sound Bwoy Buriel" with the words "Boom bye bye / In a batty boy head," when almost the exact same words are the ones that got **Buju Banton** in major trouble with the gay community? 3. Are we tripping, or is **phat gold jewelry** making a comeback? 4. Why does it seem like *MTV Jams* is really just the *Solid Gold* of the '90s? 5. Why do we hear model **Veronica Webb** is dating **4?** 6. **R. Kelly**, **Dallas Austin**, and **Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis** are supertalented, no doubt—but why did **Michael Jackson** not choose any **Babyface** or **Teddy Riley** songs for his new album? 7. Why does the new **Debbie Allen/L.L. Cool J** sitcom, *In the House*, have none of the flavor of *A Different World* and all the corniness of *Who's the Boss*? 8. Isn't it sad that **Pete Rock & C.L. Smooth** decided not to participate in a benefit for the Goods for Guns Foundation at Madison Square Garden because they broke up? 9. Even though it seems ridiculous, why do we have the feeling that **Eddie and Gerald Levert's** cover of **Bette Midler's** "Wind Beneath My Wings" is going to be huge? (It's from their upcoming duet album.) 10. Is it because the stuff is so chic and fierce at the same time that we love **Mecca** gear? 11. Are we late hearing about **T-Boz** (of **TLC**) and **Mr. Dalvin's** (of **Jodeci**) romance? 12. If **All-4-One** and **Color Me Badd** had a not-so-attractive contest, who would win? 13. Can anyone explain why **Monica Arnold** (age 14) and **Usher Raymond** (16) sound so soulful and adult on "Let's Straighten It Out" from the *Panther* soundtrack? 14. *The Show*, **Russell Simmons's** backstage documentary—featuring the **Notorious B.I.G.**, **Warren G**, **Wu-Tang Clan**, **Run-D.M.C.**, **Craig Mack**, and **Snoop Doggy Dogg**—is one of the best films of the year, but as with all things hip hop, we have to ask, Where are the girls? 15. Why did **Oprah Winfrey** turn it out at the *Essence* Awards with her spoken-word performance? 16. Is it really fly or really wrong that **Coolio** has a role in an upcoming film—"the first black fun-in-the-sun movie"—called *Phat Beach*? 17. Can one artist or group **hold people's attention** for 3.5 minutes, or does everybody always have to be guesting in everybody else's videos? 18. Is it because he was so awesome as **Doc Holliday** in 1993's *Tombstone* that we knew **Val Kilmer** was going to be the ultimate **Batman**? 19. How come nobody knows that **Rusty Cundieff** (*Tales From the Hood*, *Fear of a Black Hat*) is the funniest young director working today? 20. And can anyone tell us when (and *why*) people started carrying **boom boxes** on the street again?



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Just the Facts

Nearly half of all recorded music purchased in the U.S. last year was at least two years old. These albums, often called "catalog" releases, account for \$5 billion a year in revenue for the music industry.

- Hip hop album that has been on *Billboard's* Top 50 Pop Catalog Albums chart the longest: The Beastie Boys' 1986 *Licensed to Ill* (127 weeks and counting)
- Number of hip hop albums on the chart as of May 1995: 2 (*Licensed to Ill* and Eazy-E's 1988 *Eazy-Duz-It*)
- Number of rock albums on chart: 37
- Top-selling catalog album since the chart was created in 1991: Bob Marley & the Wailers' 1984 *Legend*
- Number of greatest hits albums on chart: 19
- Albums that recently appeared on the chart within weeks of an artist's death: Nirvana's 1989 *Bleach*, *Eazy-Duz-It*, and

- Selena's 1993 *Mis Mejores Canciones*—17
- Super Exitos* and 1990 *Ven Conmigo*
- Number of albums on chart by groups with at least one dead member: 9
- Number of albums by dead solo acts: 7
- Number of albums by groups/acts on chart who are currently retired: 7
- Number of albums by groups/acts that should be retired: 27
- Number of R&B albums on chart: 1, Boyz II Men's 1991 *Cooleyhighharmony*
- Classic hip hop albums that have never appeared on the Top Pop Catalog Albums chart: Run-D.M.C.'s 1986 *Raising Hell*, Public Enemy's 1988 *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, and Ice Cube's 1990 *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted*

Sources: Los Angeles Times, *Billboard*. Compiled by Joseph V. Trella



George Clinton and Bootsy Collins

'AXIOM FUNK: FUNKRONOMICON'

Various Artists • Axiom

Master guitarist Buckethead is deep into an anti-structure throwdown. The haunted-house voices have stopped chanting about "Hideous Mutant Freekz." Now it's his turn. Bloodthirsty, he's driving through the heart of the rhythm with bolts of distortion. What's this? Voices again, in time spanning two or three keys. Buckethead doesn't seem to like it; he tries his best to find another, more oppositional key. For five seconds or so, his guitar and the chorus of voices are locked in a collision that nobody will win.

Most producers would have edited out this gnarled near-breakdown. Not Bill Laswell. The brains behind Axiom Records, Laswell not only savors unusual smashups and culture clashes; he goes out of his way to make them happen. The two-CD *Axiom Funk: Funkronomicon* collects a few of these "experiments," and offers not just hard funk jams but the more thoughtful, late-night-end-of-session stuff we rarely get to hear.

At times, it seems like Laswell is running a retirement home for Old Funk Veterans. None other than Sly Stone makes an appearance, playing keyboards and contributing a few words to "Tell the World," a dreadfully diffuse attempt at a pop song. And of course, there are glimpses of George Clinton and the P-Funk crew, vamping through a meditation on funk addiction, "Under the Influence (Jes Grew)."

"Under the Influence" is cool, but you've heard better P-Funk. The most important music on this erratic compilation comes from the freer, improvisation-oriented rounds. Buckethead supplies a thoughtful space-jam introduction to "Trumpets and Violins, Violins," a recently discovered Hendrix poem recited by Last Poets founding member Abiodun Oyewole. And the late Eddie Hazel, Funkadelic's disastrously underrecognized genius who died in 1992, uses his overdriven guitar to forge a connection between Hendrix and Metallica on the 12-minute "Orbitron Attack." Hazel is also heard in "Pray My Soul," an elegiac duet with omnipresent organist Bernie Worrell. A writing bit of guitar gospel, this piece argues that the funk can be more musically diverse than is generally acknowledged—a music built on finesse as much as raw fire.

Tom Moon

MACK 10

Mack 10 • Priority

Mack 10's unimpressive debut resuscitates too many stale musical angles (P-Funk, G-funk, and otherwise) on pedestrian subject matter (crime, cars, and sex) to carry much relevance outside his own Inglewood, Calif. 'hood. Mack 10's most noteworthy moment belongs not to Mack 10 but to his mentor: "Hip hop started in the West," Ice Cube declares on "West Side Slaughter House," a revisionist anthem that—in addition to its O.J. references and decidedly East Coast drum track—boasts the kind of ferocious performance not heard from Cube in years. But the glare from this one shining moment only exposes Mack 10's shortcomings. Reduced to a bit player on his own disc, the remaining material quickly brings to mind one of Jeru the Damaja's adages: "The skills are shot/'Cause any idiot can let off a Glock."

Chairman Mao



MACK 10/ATLANTIC



incog-nito

100° and Rising
Verve Forecast/Talkin' Loud

London-based collective Incognito is a live and direct experience. Onstage, front man Jean-Paul "Bluey" Maunick leads a 15-piece band—complete with string section—through a jazzy labyrinth with a spontaneity that seems almost impossible to translate onto a record. But somehow, Bluey, 38, manages to capture that energy on wax and revolutionize nouveau jazz with majestic virtuosity year after year.

Along with bands like Level 42 and Shakatak, Incognito pioneered Britain's hot buttered soul scene (also known as acid jazz) with a steady flow of great, low-key albums starting with 1981's *Jazz-Funk*. It's no surprise that both George Benson and Ramsey Lewis have Bluey producing new material for them.

Brilliantly orchestrated, Incognito's new *100° and Rising* is an essential funk-soul sensation. Biting, spiritual vocals come courtesy of Joy Malcolm, Barry Stewart, and Pamela Anderson (sister of Jhelisa and cousin of Carleen)—they wail and sail effortlessly through the stylish instrumentation. Sing-along tracks like "Where Did We Go Wrong" and "Everyday" recall a time when soul was still a symbol of stripped-down emotion and inner-city revolution. The wondrous band lets loose with funky breakbeats and breezy melodies on such instrumentals as "After the Fall" and "Millennium." The title track is a jambalaya of percussive freestyle.

So as the next wave of Brit funkateers rises to mainstream notoriety by exploring various shades of black music (trip hop, swingbeat, etc.), Incognito still shine as keepers of the lone groove, definitive in their stance. And even though they may not hold the heavyweight title within the one-hit-wonder crowd—like their mates Brand New Heavies—Incognito are demonstrating the longevity of true champions. **Vikki Tobak**

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Pewter metallic leather classic trench coat by Polo by Ralph Lauren \$1,690 (Polo/Ralph Lauren, Madison Avenue, N.Y.C., and Beverly Hills).

Table of Contents

K-C: Double-breasted coat by Jean Paul Gaultier; high-waist trouser \$250 by John Bartlett (Neiman Marcus, select stores nationwide). DeVante: Vinyl vest \$465 by JPG (Chivari, N.Y.C., and Henri Bendel, N.Y.C.); wool with acrylic stripe trouser \$1,240 by Yohji Yamamoto (Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C., and Barney's New York, N.Y.C.); leather boots by Mag. (David, N.Y.C., and Urban Outfitters, nationwide); sunglasses by Mossimo Optic (Barneys, nationwide, and Nordstrom, Northwest). Dalvin: Satin vest \$235 by Artafact (Chivari, N.Y.C., and Sami Dinar, Beverly Hills); ski pants \$235 by DKNY (Chivari, N.Y.C., and Macy's, Northeast). Jolo: Velvet ban-collar shirt with gold studs \$160 and gladiator trousers with snap cuffs \$125, both by Polo by Ralph Lauren (Polo/Ralph Lauren, Madison Avenue, N.Y.C., and Beverly Hills, and Macy's, N.Y.C.). All other boots by Chippewa (Alcala's Western, Chicago; Gubby Lintoo, L.A.; St. Marks Leather, N.Y.C.; and Village Cobbler, N.Y.C.).

"Tuff Love"

page 64: Same as Contents, except K-C's stretch velour vest \$500 by JPG (Chivari, N.Y.C., and Henri Bendel, N.Y.C.).

page 66: K-C: Same as Contents, except red satin tuxedo shirt \$215 by Katharine Hamnett (Barneys New York, N.Y.C., and Ron Herman, L.A.); black wool trouser \$200 by Paul Smith (Paul Smith, N.Y.C., and Fred Segal, L.A.). Jolo: Black overcoat \$3,900 by Yohji Yamamoto (Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C.); red cord shirt \$165 by Paul Smith (Paul Smith, N.Y.C., and In Two, Minneapolis); Sheryl's (left) and Ted's dresses, both by Marcel Marston; classic pump by Dolce & Gabbana and slip-on heels by Susan Bennett/Warren Edwards.

page 67: Dalvin: Red velvet robe \$400 by Dolce & Gabbana (Saks Fifth Avenue, select stores, and Dolce & Gabbana, Houston), black trouser \$670 by Yohji Yamamoto (Ron Ross, N.Y.C., and Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C.), boots by Chippewa (Midwest Shoes, L.A.). DeVante: Velvet vest \$280 by Paul Smith (Paul Smith, N.Y.C., and Barney's New York, N.Y.C.); trouser by Jean Paul Gaultier; sunglasses by Ray-Ban (Fungaro and Sunglass Hut, nationwide). Coso: Conet dress by Dolce & Gabbana; shoes by Susan Bennett/Warren Edwards.

page 68: Same as Contents, except Dalvin's stressed leather belt by Gueset (Macy's, nationwide, and the Broadway, West Coast) and K-C's stretch velour vest, same as page 64.

VIBE Fashion—"Urban Warriors"

page 104: Nate: Edwardian coat by Matsuda (Matsuda, N.Y.C.); shirt with cuffs \$220 by Dolce & Gabbana (Dolce & Gabbana, Houston, and Truffa, L.A.); Jean \$35 by CK Denim (Bloomingdale's and Macy's, nationwide); lac-up shoes by Giorgio Armani (Giorgio Armani boutique, N.Y.C., and Beverly Hills); beads by Beads of Paradise, N.Y.C.

page 105: Newman: Collarless shirt \$360 by Dolce & Gabbana (Neiman Marcus, select stores, and Louis, Boston); wool topcoat \$660 by Katharine Hamnett (Barneys, select stores, and Alex Forma, Portland, Ore.); vest \$500 by Giorgio Armani (Emporio Armani, N.Y.C. and Boston); necklace and ring, both by Jill Platter (Barneys New York, N.Y.C.).

page 106: Royston: Shirt \$180 by Paul Smith (Paul Smith, N.Y.C., and Barney's New York, N.Y.C.); vest \$225 by Emporio Armani and trouser from a suit by Giorgio Armani (Giorgio Armani, N.Y.C.); arm-bands by Jill Platter (Barneys New York, N.Y.C.). Newman: Polo shirt and knit cap by Jean Paul Gaultier; vest \$500 and trouser from a suit, both by Giorgio Armani (at Giorgio Armani, N.Y.C.).

page 107: Royston: Shirt \$80 by Comme des Garçons (Barneys New York, N.Y.C., and Riccardo, Boston); vest and herringbone trouser from a suit \$1,215 by Dolce & Gabbana (Louis, Boston); scarf by Giorgio Armani; beads by Beads of Paradise, N.Y.C.

page 108: Newman: Fur-collared sweater by Jean Paul Gaultier; satin vest \$500 by Matsuda (Neiman Marcus, San Francisco, and Ron Ross, L.A.); wool trouser \$275 by Comme des Garçons (Comme des Garçons, Soho, N.Y.C., and Fred Segal, L.A.); bracelets by Jill Platter (Barneys New York, N.Y.C.).

page 109: Woolen suit and knit cap by Jean Paul Gaultier.

Look—"Gean Ghetto Golf"

pages 112 and 113: Arne: Pique shirt \$25.00 and cotton will \$36, both by Pivov Rules (select Bloomingdale's and Saks Fifth Avenue stores nationwide); upside-down visor by Pivov Rules (select Bloomingdale's and Saks Fifth Avenue stores nationwide); Pique dress \$63 by Pivov Rules (800-288-4900); beret by Dave Cohen (Chivari, N.Y.C.); socks and shoes by Polo by Ralph Lauren.

Arne: Argyle knit sweater \$69 by Biat (Urban Outfitters, nationwide, and Swish, N.Y.C.); linen shorts \$58 by Tommy Hilfinger (Macy's, N.Y.C.); socks and golf shoes by Adidas. Niaman: Pique shirt \$46 by Pivov Rules (Lord and Taylor, select stores nationwide; for information, call 800-288-4900); sweater vest \$83 by Clark (Black Moon, Chicago); cotton wrap shirt \$50 by Gueset (Rich's, Atlanta, and Gueset's stores nationwide); argyle sneakers by Vans (better department stores nationwide); Terry cloth linen and visor, both by PNB (Union, N.Y.C., and Wish, Atlanta).

Arne: Sweater vest \$88 by Klurk at DL156 (No. 6, Toronto); trouser \$77.50 and leather golf shoes, both by Polo by Ralph Lauren (Polo Sport, Madison Avenue, N.Y.C., and country clubs and resorts nationwide). Niaman: Argyle cardigan \$120 (Air Market, N.Y.C., and Union, N.Y.C. and L.A.) and a knit knit knit \$10 (No. 6, Toronto, and Saks Fifth Ave., San Francisco), both by Klurk at DL156; Atlanta, and Gueset's stores nationwide; argyle sneakers by Vans (better department stores nationwide); Terry cloth linen and visor, both by PNB (Union, N.Y.C., and Wish, Atlanta).

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PROPS

CHARLIE PARKER

Born in Kansas. And, amazingly, he made his way out of the state to become one of the greatest jazz musicians ever. Parker, whose 84th birthday is celebrated today (August 29, 1925), and whose compositions are planned with much care, is Parker's *Mood* (Verve), a tribute album by young lions Roy Hargrove, Christian McBride, and Stephen Scott. Don't think these talented artists have mastered Parker's 50-year-old compositions, though. At one recording session, Scott, a gifted pianist, tried going through "Dexterly," a rigorous Parker song. After stumbling on the same passage over and over again, he finally tilted his head to the side and groaned, "Aaash, gymnastics! Can't fuck with Bird!"

The Kansas City, Kansas-born Parker stormed onto the scene in 1945 and was soon terrorizing New York's famed 52nd Street strip. His visionary alto sax playing flipped the script on the dance-oriented swing of the time, giving birth to what would come to be called bebop. With Kenny Clarke, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach, Parker took the jazz styles of his musical elders, laced them with ferocious melodies and difficult chord changes, and pushed tempos to breakneck speeds that other musicians couldn't keep up with. "Yeah, the melodies are technically challenging," says Hargrove, "but what Bird did, *man*, that goes way beyond technicality. It was deep."

In his improvised solos, Parker anticipated hip hop's use of samples by quoting everything from radio commercials to car horns, backfiring engines, Stravinsky, whatever. To him, jazz was a thoroughly modern form of expression created by people struggling for freedom in their lives and in their art.

Bird struggled with other forces as well. On March 12, 1955, he succumbed to an 18-year heroin addiction. It's said that his passing was accompanied by a clap of thunder. The next day, *BIRD LIVES!* graffiti was scrawled all over Greenwich Village, and the world began to mourn the loss of its 35-year-old genius. He will always be remembered as a major innovator of bebop, a term that—ironically—he always disliked. "Let's not call it bebop," said Bird. "Let's call it music."

Cory Johnson

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